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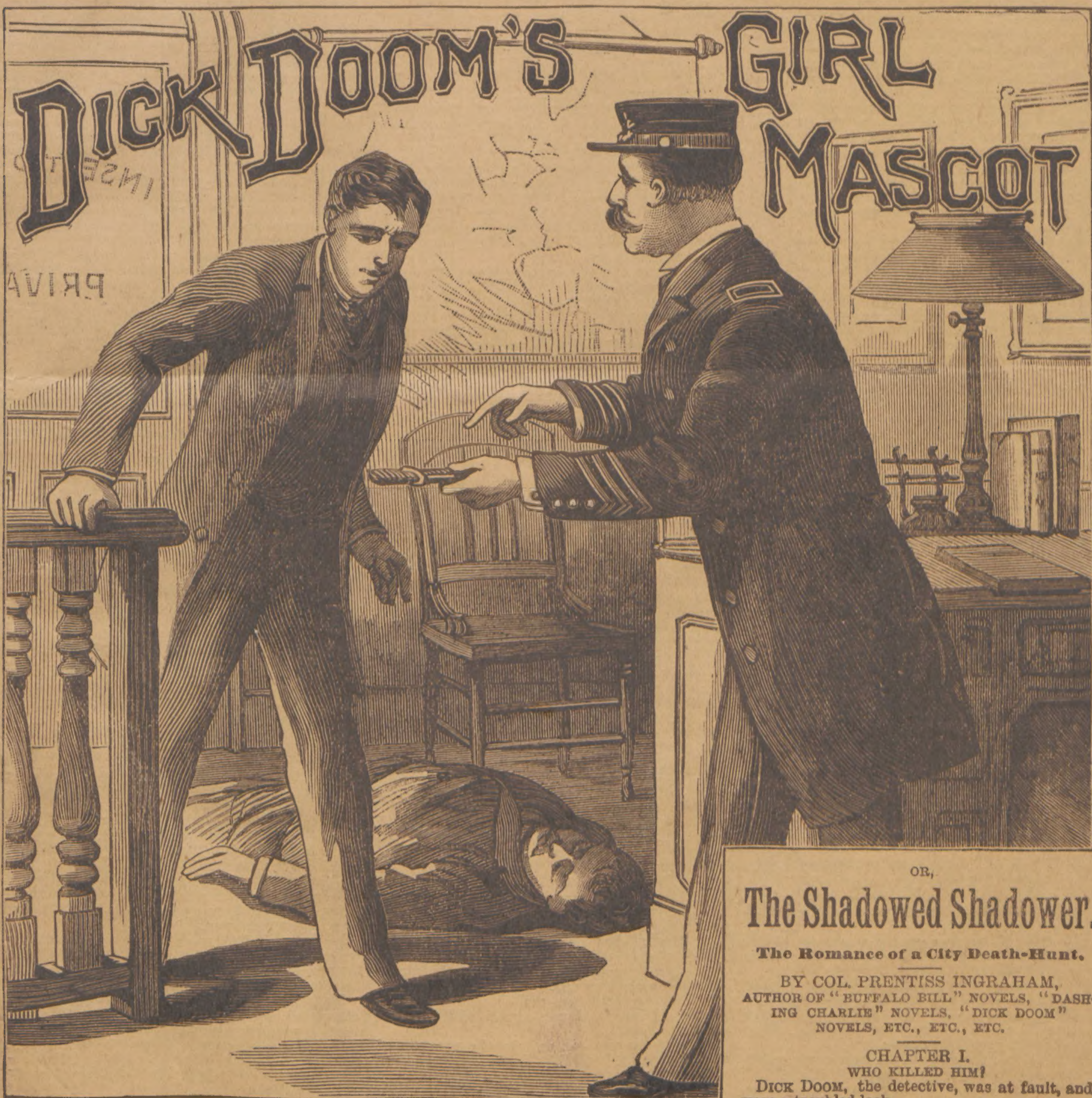
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DICK DOOM TOOK UP THE KNIFE, AND, LOOKING CAREFULLY AT IT, SAID ALOUD:
"GOLD GHOUL, EXECUTIONER!"

OR, The Shadowed Shadower.

The Romance of a City Death-Hunt.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "BUFFALO BILL" NOVELS, "DASH-
ING CHARLIE" NOVELS, "DICK DOOM"
NOVELS, ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

WHO KILLED HIM?

DICK DOOM, the detective, was at fault, and
wore a troubled look.

Must he, the Sleepless Ferret of the Golden
Fetters, acknowledge himself foiled?

Had he been called in to fathom a case he could not find a way to solve?

It had foiled all others; every detective who had sought to penetrate the mystery had lost his life, or had been wounded.

It was a fatal trail for any man to follow, and when no longer members of the Secret Service League of New York dared seek to shadow the slayers of half a dozen lives, he, Dick Doom, had been sent for by the chief of police, and asked if he dared make the attempt.

Promptly had he accepted the task, and yet he left the chief's office at a loss to know which way to turn or what to do.

He held a warning in his hand which read:

"Let any man attempt to run down the murderer of Sedley Seaton and he is doomed to death.

"Remember those who have made the attempt, and be warned by their fate.

"THE GOLD GHOULS."

In the face of this letter the chief of the Secret Service had failed to find any man of his force who would seek to solve the mysterious murder of Sedley Seaton, and the certain death that had overtaken the detectives who had started upon the search.

But, Dick Doom had said:

"I will undertake the work, chief, and I will bring the murderers to justice."

Ten minutes after he had uttered these words he went forth into the street just at the hour of midnight, pondering in his mind the strange story he had heard, and with the determination to hunt down the Gold Ghouls or lose his own life in the attempt.

Dick Doom was a mystery-character himself, one whom no man knew, not even the chiefs of the Secret Service Bureaus who employed him.

What his life had been, if any man knew, no one had been found to tell the story.

His slender, graceful form, handsome face, with its perfect features, and dreamy, dark eyes led many to vow that he was a woman in disguise.

Yet he possessed the strength of a giant, was quick as a cat in his movements, could endure any hardship, would face any danger, was a dead shot and a dangerous one to arouse.

Foiled at all points to trail down the perpetrators of a most mysterious murder and heavy robbery, the New York chief of police had sent for Dick Doom and asked him if he would go upon what the detectives had all begun to call "The Fatal Trail."

Dick Doom had said at once that he would, and when the chief told him to first hear all that he had to face, he replied:

"I will take the work, sir, be it what it may."

"Remember, your life is at stake once you undertake it."

"I live with my life at stake, sir."

"Those fiends, calling themselves the Gold Ghouls, have spies even in my office, I verily believe, Dick Doom, for they know at once every man who has undertaken this work, and he has fallen under their merciless vengeance within three days after he has set out upon what really has become a Fatal Trail."

"So be it, chief."

"They may be on the watch for you, when you leave my office to-night, so suppose I have you shadowed as a protection on your way?"

Dick Doom laughed at this, and replied:

"No, chief, I thank you. I know too well what shadowing a man is, and I do not care to be shadowed through life, even for protection."

And with this Dick Doom had left Headquarters, drawn his heavy coat about him, for it was a severe and stormy night, and had started up the dark and lonesome street, for the first time worried at the case placed in his hands, not from fear of death, but from a dread that, with no clue to start on, his task would be a very difficult one.

He had not gone a square when he saw some one approaching.

Suspecting no danger then, to himself, he suddenly started back at a quick movement of the man, while at the same time there came a flash and sharp report, followed instantly by a second glare of light and a shot.

The flash of two weapons for a moment blinded Dick Doom, but in an instant he had drawn a revolver and stood at bay.

There was no need for him to protect himself from the man who had started to fire upon him, and had fired as he was falling, for at his feet lay the form of one writhing in death, while from his lips came the words:

"Curse you, Dick Doom. You were too quick for me with your gun; you have killed me!"

"I killed you, man? Why I never even drew my weapon until you fell," cried Dick Doom in utter amazement.

"Don't lie to one you have murdered, for I saw you fire the shot."

"Oh! where is my gun, for if I had it even now I would kill you!" and the stricken man felt about on the pavement for his revolver, to carry out his threat.

Quickly Dick Doom stooped and picked up the weapon, which in falling had struck his foot, while he said:

"My dear fellow, upon my honor I did not fire on you, though I did see two flashes, and heard two reports, within a few feet of each other."

"Who, and what are you? And why did you seek my life?" asked Dick Doom impressively, while in a low voice the answer came from the dying man:

"Read the answer on my revolver why I sought your life, Dick Doom; it is engraven there!"

As the dying man uttered these strange words, referring the detective to his revolver as an answer to the question of why he had sought his life, there was heard the sound of running feet, and a squad of police officers came up at a double-quick, just as the door of the house before which the scene had occurred opened and in the light of the hall stood a young girl who asked anxiously:

"Oh, sir, tell me what has happened?"

CHAPTER II.

A RED MYSTERY.

DICK DOOM was astounded.

Right before his face a murder had occurred, and he had not seen the murderer, nor could he account for it.

Had the man fired both shots?

Had one of them been an accident and entered the body of the would-be assassin of himself?

He could not then answer the question, and so turned to the officers as they came up and said:

"Men, a man has been shot here and he is dead—yes, he is dead," he added, bending over the motionless form.

"He drew a revolver to kill me, for he admitted as much, but before he could fire he was shot, but by whom I do not know. I think he must have accidentally shot himself."

"You'll have to go with us, for that story don't clear you," said the sergeant.

"Certainly, I will return with you, sergeant," and turning to the young girl who still stood in the open door he raised his hat and called out:

"A man has been most mysteriously shot, miss, in front of your door; but the officers are here, and you had better retire into the house."

The door was at once closed as the girl said firmly:

"I thank you, sir."

"Come, sergeant, this young man did not fire the shot that killed the one lying here, as his revolver will show, if he has one," said a man who had just come across the street.

"What do you know about it?" asked the sergeant suspiciously.

"Perhaps more than any one else, now that man is dead, for I was feeling in my pocket for my night-key, having just come home, when I saw that man, the dead one, halt and throw out his hand toward this one."

"As he did so a shot was fired from the area of this very house—from the steps it seemed to me—and as that man fell he fired at the gentleman you have in charge, but convulsively, with out effect."

"I went into my house to tell my wife not to be alarmed, and as I crossed the street I heard your words, which imply that you suspect this young man of the shooting."

"I do; and I must know more of you, too," said the sergeant, and he added to his men:

"Bring him along too!"

Not the slightest resistance was offered by either Dick Doom or the stranger who had come to his rescue, and the officers started for Headquarters, a block away, with their two prisoners and the dead body.

As they reached Headquarters the chief was just leaving his office and called out:

"Ho, my young friend, what does this mean, your being under arrest?"

"Your sergeant has made a mistake, chief, that is all, and I did not care to make myself known to him."

"May I see you, sir, and in the presence of this gentleman?" and Dick Doom pointed to the stranger.

"Certainly. Sergeant, I will be responsible for these two gentlemen—ah! a dead body then?"

"Yes, sir, the man that fly young gent killed awhile ago."

"See here, sergeant, you may have to prove your charge or lose your fat berth, so do not be too fresh," and Dick Doom's eyes flashed as he faced the sergeant, who shrunk back at his glance, while the chief said sternly:

"I, not you, Sergeant O'Hara, will attend to this matter, sir," and he led the way into his office, followed by Dick Doom and the stranger, the former saying in a low tone:

"I am not known, sir, so do not speak my name. This man is a perfect stranger to me, also."

The chief nodded and then said:

"Now, sir, what is this trouble that has cost a human life?"

"I have but little to tell, sir, for I was met by a man who started to fire upon me, when he was shot by some one unknown, and certainly within a few feet of him."

"I saw two flashes, heard two reports, and a man fell at my feet, his revolver striking me on the foot."

"The sergeant has his revolver and mine."

"May I ask you to get them at once, sir?"

The chief rung a bell, gave an order and turned to the stranger.

"Now, sir, your story."

"I live just opposite to where the tragedy occurred, sir. My name is Alex Dawson, and I am a lawyer. I had been to the home of a client, to write his will, as he is very sick, and was on my stoop feeling for my night-key, when I saw the man who is now dead shrink back into the shadow of a tree, and throw out his hand."

"There was a light in the windows of the house in front of which he stood, so that I saw his action distinctly."

"Before he could fire, a flash, followed by a report, came from the other side of him, from under the steps of the house, by the door leading into the basement, and the man fell, firing in the air convulsively as he did so."

"I entered my own house to prevent my wife becoming alarmed; then, crossing the street, I discovered that your sergeant suspected this young gentleman of the murder."

"That is all I can tell you, sir."

"Thank you, Mr. Dawson. You can return to your home, sir, and if I need further testimony, I will send for you," said the chief.

The lawyer retired, and an officer having brought in the weapons taken from Dick Doom, and the one used by the intended assassin, the chief said:

"No bullet is missing from your revolvers, Dick."

"No, sir; I was fired upon, as stated, and when I asked the dying man why he had wished to kill me he distinctly spoke these words:

"Read the answer on my revolver, Dick Doom, why I sought your life, for it is engraven there."

The chief quickly examined the revolver and an exclamation of amazement broke from his lips as he cried:

"See here, Dick Doom, what is engraven upon the revolver with which that man sought your life—

"'THE GOLD GHOULS' EXECUTIONER!'"

"Yes, their assassin is already upon your track," and the chief of the Secret Service Bureau was deeply impressed with what the revolver had revealed.

CHAPTER III.

WAS SHE GUILTY.

DICK DOOM's face did not change color at the assertion of the chief, that the assassin was already upon his track.

He had believed that the man who had met him, and who sought his life, had been a foot-pad who intended to rob him, and did not care to take any chances.

That he had, immediately upon leaving the Headquarters, been singled out as a detective going to fathom the mystery of the Sedley Seaton case, had not entered his mind.

He had only just arrived in the city, in answer to the chief's summons, and how could it be known that he had enlisted in the work of hunting down the Gold Ghouls?

Yet, there was the fact that his life had been attempted, and the dying man's words told him that his revolver would explain the reason of the intended assassination. There lay the revolver upon the desk, a witness of the truth of the confession of the one whose lips were then forever sealed by death.

The chief seemed far more worried over the tragic beginning of the services of Dick Doom,

than did the young detective, and he at last turned and said:

"Well, Dick, of course I would have taken your story of the affair, yet I am glad to have had the testimony of Mr. Dawson."

"It is better, sir, and will you kindly instruct that wooden-headed sergeant to use a little more discretion in charging people with murder?"

In response the chief rung the bell and sent for Sergeant O'Hara.

"I wish to say, Sergeant O'Hara, that this young gentleman no more killed that man than you did, and in future remember that it is not for a police officer to make charges against any one until he is before the proper person to hear them."

The sergeant bowed and departed, but his looks showed that he was angry with Dick Doom not being the assassin so that his suspicion against him would have been correct.

"Now, Dick, what do you say about following up this case against the Gold Ghouls, for for you have very quickly discovered that it is a fatal trail."

"I have, sir, and I am doubly determined, now, to see the end of it."

"You are not one to back down, I know that well enough."

"No, sir; nor am I one to give up a case until I know all there is in it."

"Now I know that I did not kill that man, and his dying confession to me, and his revolver, prove that he was the avenger of the Gold Ghouls."

"That is true, Dick."

"And more—so quickly to be on my track, proves that your office is watched for any one who may be suspected of being upon the track of this mystery attending the Sedley Seaton murder."

"Yes; that undoubtedly is the fact."

"But, stranger still, the man called me by name!"

"Do you recall the man's face?"

"I have seen it before, sir; I recognized that much when I saw it in the light of the hall outside."

"I'll have it brought here so you can get a better and undisturbed look at the face and the person."

"I would like to have the view, sir."

The body was brought in, and the sergeant reported finding ninety dollars, a watch and chain, both valuable, and a knife, in searching the remains.

Dick Doom took up the knife, and, looking carefully at it, said aloud:

"GOLD GHOUL, EXECUTIONER."

"Chief, this bowie-knife bears the same inscription engraven upon the man's revolver."

"Well, there is now no doubt as to the man being a member of that mysterious band of murderers, doubtless their appointed executioner or assassin. Do you recognize his face?"

"Strange, sir, but I cannot recall when or where I have seen his face, yet I have met him, I am sure, and under circumstances I know that were out of the common."

"Now, chief, as Mr. Dawson said that shot, the first one, and which killed this man, came, as well as he could make it out, from the steps, or area of the house opposite to which the tragedy occurred, would it not be well to send there at once and find out who lives there, for I cannot understand that young girl appearing so quickly, and though after midnight, all dressed as she was."

"I'll send at once, Dick, and I am glad for the suggestion, for there may be more in that than appears upon the surface."

A detective was at once dispatched to the house, with instructions to say that the chief of police wished to tell the ladies not to be alarmed, and to find out who lived there, as he desired to ask the young lady if she had discovered anything of a suspicious nature going on before the shots were fired.

In just fifteen minutes the detective returned with the startling information that no one lived at the house in question, and it had not been occupied for several months.

"And yet that young girl certainly appeared in the doorway of that house and there was a light in the hall and in the parlor windows."

"Chief, this mystery deepens. Who is that young girl?" emphatically demanded Dick Doom.

The bewildered chief could not answer the question, while the further question burst from his lips:

"Dick Doom, did that young girl kill that man?"

CHAPTER III.

A FRUITLESS SEARCH.

DICK DOOM heard the report of the man, sent to see who dwelt in the house, where he had seen the young girl appear, with incredulity.

He could not believe that there was no one there, that the house had not been rented for some time.

But he said nothing before the detective as to what he thought, and only to the chief when the man had left the inner office.

"That man is reliable, chief?" he asked.

"Perfectly so."

"He has made a mistake then in the house, sir."

"That could not be, Dick."

"Why so, sir?"

"The house, as I remember it, is peculiarly situated, for on one corner of the block, running back to it, is a piano manufactory, and upon the other corner, also extending back to its walls is a large machine-shop, the house being the only one facing the street on that block, and between the rears of the two buildings named."

"Indeed!"

"Then there can be no mistake, sir."

"None."

"I will go there and make a search myself."

"And I will accompany you, Dick, for I am becoming most deeply interested in this decidedly mysterious case."

The chief arose and two dark lanterns were secured, while Dick Doom said:

"Never mind any keys, chief, for I have a bunch here that will unlock every door."

The two then put on their great-coats and started out into the darkness and storm.

The streets were wholly deserted now, for the storm still continued, and the wind facing them drove the sleet into their faces, while Dick said:

"I had my face bent low to avoid the stinging sleet, so did not see the man until he was close upon me."

"It was by the light from the windows of that house that I then saw his attempt to kill me—yes, chief, this is the house."

The two halted before the door of a high stoop house, four stories in height, and built, as the chief had said, between two buildings running back from either corner to it.

The house was closed now and all dark, from basement to attic.

"This is the house I referred to, Dick."

"But see, it is unoccupied, for there is the notice stuck on the window."

"Yet the lights came from those windows, sir, and the young girl appeared in that doorway."

"If other than you said so, Dick, I would not believe it."

"My dear chief, your officers saw the girl and heard what she said."

"Then let us enter."

Dick Doom stepped into the little yard, which had an iron fence in front of it, and went down under the high stoop.

"Suppose I go in alone, sir, while you remain in hiding here to stop any one who may come out."

"I had better go back and get some of my men, Dick."

"No, chief, we can do better alone."

"It is risky business, you know."

"Very true, sir, but then I am armed."

"I do not believe that Detective Hendrick did go into the house, now I see the situation," said the chief.

"I am sure that he did not, sir," and as Dick Doom spoke he put a key into the lock of the lower door, and, after a few trials with different keys, found one that unlocked it.

The chief stepped into the area and said:

"I can command both doors here."

Then Dick Doom entered the lower hall and closed the door behind him.

He opened the bull's eye slide of his dark lantern and flashed it before him, holding it off at arm's length, for he knew a shot would be aimed near the lantern, if any one was in hiding and meant to fire, believing that he was just behind it.

But there was no one in the hall, and a search of the dining-room on his right revealed that it was unoccupied.

Then he went into the kitchen, and it too held no one.

He saw that the rear doors were securely locked on the inside, so that no one had passed out that way.

He then ascended from the basement to the first floor.

There was a parlor in front, a rear room and

hall room, but not a piece of furniture was in any one of them, and not a soul was visible.

As he started up-stairs to the second floor his eyes fell upon something white upon the floor.

He quickly picked it up and discovered a delicate handkerchief, sweetly scented with violet perfume.

In one corner were two initials:

"V. V."

"Ah!" said Dick Doom aloud, and he put the handkerchief in his pocket and continued the search.

Up to the very attic he went, and when at last he reappeared at the basement door the chief said:

"I was growing anxious about you, Dick."

"But the search was utterly fruitless of results, eh?"

"I found no one, sir, and there is not a piece of furniture in the whole house."

"All was dark, damp and dismal there."

"And that young girl?"

"She appeared in the doorway, sir, as I have stated," was the quiet response of Dick Doom.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WARNING.

DICK DOOM parted with the chief a few squares from the deserted house, each going to their respective homes.

It was just two o'clock when Dick Doom entered the hotel where he was stopping, a quiet place on Eighteenth street, and was given his key by the night clerk, who addressed him as:

"Mr. Richards."

It was by the names of "D. Richards and Mrs. D. Richards" that Dick Doom had registered at the hotel, for he never cared to have any one know him, except the chief and the few men he was most intimately associated with, as Dick Doom.

He had been gone up to his room perhaps half an hour when a messenger called with an important note for D. Richards.

He was sent at once up to the room of the detective, and a knock on Number One Hundred was answered by a cheery response to enter, showing that the inmate had not retired.

When Dick Doom had reached his rooms, for he had a parlor and two bedrooms adjoining, he laid aside his storm coat and hat, drew on his slippers and dressing-gown, and sat down in front of the glowing fire.

He took from his pocket then the handkerchief he had picked up in the deserted house, and began to examine it closely.

"A dainty thing it is, and recently dropped there, for the perfume is fresh upon it."

"Then, too, these are strange initials—V. V.—and prettily embroidered."

"Yes, it is the property of some one of means, and in the higher walks of life."

"Now, what was the owner of this handkerchief doing in that deserted house, at midnight, and where did she go to disappear so quickly and so suddenly?"

"The chief doubts her being there, and will question his officers in the morning to see if I imagined it."

"So be it, for I am willing to drop all reference to her, for that will help me in my work."

"But I must find the owner of this handkerchief, for either she, or some one with her whom I did not see, killed that executioner of the Gold Ghouls."

"To-morrow, too, I must learn the whole story of this Sedley Seaton murder by a band of secret assassins, for I got little information to-night."

So was Dick Doom musing when the knock came upon his door.

He quickly thrust the handkerchief out of sight, and bade the visitor come in.

The messenger entered, all muffled up so as to be completely hidden, except his bright eyes.

"Be you Mr. Richards?" he asked.

"I am."

"This is for D. Richards."

"I answer to that name."

"Well I was given a two dollar note to bring you this and deliver to you only."

"Thank you," and as the boy handed over the note he was turning to go when Dick Doom said:

"Wait a moment please, for there may be an answer."

"Warm yourself there by the fire."

"I hain't cold, and there hain't no answer."

"How do you know?"

"She told me so."

"Ah! it was sent by a lady then?"

"Yes, and you bet she's a bute."

Dick Doom smiled at the complimentary slang used by the boy, and opened the note.

It had been written in the messenger call office, and upon the paper found there.

It was as follows, and the hand was evidently disguised:

"DICK DOOM, Detective:—

"Sir:—Though unknown to many of those whom you employ, you are yet known to a number of those who are your foes.

"You are fearless, I know, yet your life is as easily taken as the life of an infant, if the lead or steel strikes right.

"You have entered upon a task that will cost you your life, and gain nothing, for the Gold Ghouls will still continue to kill and to rob their victims at will.

"They belong to a hardened class of beings who believe that there is nothing true and good, that the world owes them a living, and they have a right to get it at any sacrifice.

"Those who have attempted to hunt them down have met only with death, and such was very nearly your fate to-night.

"That they can strike a death-blow and secure gold, to-morrow will reveal, while even the hounds of the law are upon their track.

"Be warned therefore and give up this red trail you are following, for it leads but to your grave.

"Obey me in this and you will find that I have been,

"Your

"MASCOT."

Dick Doom read this strange warning twice over, and then turned to the messenger, who appeared wholly oblivious of his presence, the moment the eyes of the detective were upon him, and asked:

"Who did you say gave you this letter?"

"A young lady."

"Where?"

"At the office where I work."

"Wait and I will return there with you," and Dick Doom passed into the adjoining room to prepare to go out again and face the storm.

He was absent but a moment, but when he returned he found that the messenger had skipped.

CHAPTER V.

THE GOLD GHOULS' MOTTO.

QUICK as a flash the detective was in pursuit of the messenger, yet when he reached the office he was told by the night clerk that the boy had passed out a minute in advance of him.

Dick Doom went out into the street, but in neither direction saw any trace of him.

The stamp of the messenger office was upon the envelope and paper sent him, and so he decided to go there at once.

This he did, and the sleepy clerk on duty there told him that no call had come in, no boy had been sent out since twelve o'clock.

Dick Doom then asked if a lady had not come in there for a messenger, and showed the envelope he had received, and the time-mark upon it.

"There was a young lady in here, sir, and she came in a *coupe*, for I saw her get into it.

"She asked only for paper and envelope, and she wrote a letter over at the desk there, then thanked me and left."

"Describe her, please."

"Well, sir, the glimpse I had of her face showed that she was very young and very pretty."

"And she sent no message from here?"

"No, sir."

"Is there another messenger-call office near here?"

"None nearer than Twenty-third street, sir."

Dick Doom thanked the clerk and returned to his hotel, where he again sat down to muse before the fire.

"Well, this is getting decidedly interesting, I must say."

"Now who was the girl who wrote me that warning?"

"Was it the one I saw in the doorway of that deserted house?"

"Was not that messenger none other than the girl herself, for I thought for a boy he was very much wrapped up?"

"Yes, it was the girl of the deserted house who wrote the letter and then delivered it."

"And she hints that the morrow will reveal more red work of the Gold Ghouls."

"Why, instead of giving up the chase of them I am that much more determined to ferret them out."

"Now to surprise the chief when he goes to the office in the morning, and he said that he would be down early."

Turning to his table he wrote:

"CHIEF:—

"There will be reported to you in the morning more work of the Gold Ghouls."

"Do not put your ferrets to work until you hear from me."

"D. D."

This note was at once dispatched by special messenger to the chief of the Secret Service, with the words written on the envelope:

"Dispatched at three o'clock and five minutes A. M."

Having gotten this off his mind Dick Doom turned in and was sound asleep five minutes after.

He was awake at eight o'clock sharp, and had his breakfast before nine, after which he returned to his room preparatory to going to see the chief.

The chief was just going down the steps of his house, on his way to his office, when a man sprung out of a cab and handed him a note.

Into the vehicle they both got and were driven rapidly away, halting a quarter of an hour after at Headquarters.

Entering his private office the chief found there his first assistant and said quickly:

"Can it be so, Berry, that the Gold Ghouls killed old man Mainball last night?"

"It is true, sir, as I sent you word," answered Captain Berry.

"You are sure it was done by the Gold Ghouls?"

"They left their mark, sir, tied about the neck of their victim."

"Ah! the same style of card that was found about the neck of Sedley Seaton?"

"Yes, sir, a card with edges of black and in red letters the words:

"FOR LOVE OF GOLD."

"Who found the murder had been committed?"

"The milkman got no answer to his ring, sir, for you know that Peter Mainball was a miser, and lived all alone in the old rookery, which he owned."

"The door was open, so the milkman entered, and found Mainball dead, a knife thrust in his heart."

"He at once drove to the nearest police station, and I was the first upon the scene."

"And that telltale card?"

"Here it is, sir, for according to your orders in the Seaton murder, I kept it and made no report of it."

"No, I do not wish the public to get hold of the knowledge that these assassins are a regularly organized band, or they may thwart the work we do to find them out."

"Have you any clue, sir?"

"Well, no, but I have a man at work on the case who will solve the mystery if it is to be done."

"What have you done in this matter?"

"No more, sir, than to send men to guard the body and search the old rookery for clues."

"Here is a letter that came last night for you," and Captain Berry handed to the chief the letter from Dick Doom.

The chief read it with surprise, then said:

"Berry, this is from the secret ferret I have at work upon the Gold Ghouls' track, and, remarkable to state, he informs me that there will be another blow dealt by them, and known this morning."

"Now you go up to old Mainball's, and see what you can find out, but send no one off on the case until you see me."

"I will send for my man and discover what he knows of this," and the chief hastily wrote a note and dispatched it to the hotel where Dick Doom stopped, but it was addressed to D. Richards.

Hardly had the messenger gone when the attendant officer outside of the chief's office came in and reported that there was a lady who desired an audience.

"I am too busy now to see any women," and as the chief uttered the words into his private office swept the feminine visitor whom he had refused to see.

CHAPTER VI.

THE STRANGE VISITOR.

THE face of the chief grew stern, as he beheld the visitor intrude into his room, and knew that she had overheard his words to the officer.

He turned to give her a sharp rebuke, when, before he could speak, she said:

"Now, I just knew it!"

"I just knew that you great big officials, holding high positions, would refuse to see me, a poor woman without any protector, so I just followed that red-faced cop right into your room—

"Laws sakes, man, is it drink that makes your face that red, for if it be, you're a goner," and she

looked with sympathy upon the attendant officer, who hastily beat a retreat, leaving the visitor with the chief.

"Well, men, if I don't catch it, I'm surprised, and for letting that red cat into the chief's room."

"Why she opened upon me about my red face, and I'd like to know what she says to the chief," said the officer upon coming out, addressing the group of detectives standing about.

"She looked like the Last Rose of Summer," said one.

"I tried to keep her out, but she nearly punched my nose with that Noah's Ark parachute she carried for an umbrella," another remarked.

But he was wrong, and all who expected to see the feminine make a hasty exit were mistaken, for it was over an hour before she came out.

When she did so she was as chipper as ever and went straight for the attendant.

"See here, my friend, I feel anxious about your giving up to hard drink as you do."

"I don't drink a drop," growled the man.

"No?"

"Then you ought to take in your sign for your nose is as red as a June apple."

"Maybe you just pour the grog down."

The group of detectives laughed and this turned a broadside upon them:

"Oh! now I take it you are not hard drinkers, but easy drinkers, from your looks, and my advice to you is to drink less rum and use your brains more, for you can never find a criminal, any of you, unless there is a big reward offered for him, and you are that blind you never see the wickedness going on before your very eyes, and wait for a murder to be committed that you may look for the boodle offered for the murderer."

"Good-morning, gentlemen," and the woman flitted out of the room, leaving the attendant laughing now, for he laughs best who laughs last, as the old saying goes."

When the chief found that his visitor had entered whether he wished or not, as soon as the officer attendant had escaped out of the room to escape her tongue, he turned upon her with a look that had never failed to terrify others.

But the woman laughed and said:

"Now don't be cross, big man, for I am only a wee bit of a woman that has come to do what your men cannot do, find out for you the murderer of old Miser Mainball."

The chief's expression changed at once, and the woman held a strange interest for him now.

He saw before him what appeared to be an old maid, and one from some country village at that, so strikingly ancient was her style of dress.

Somewhere in the chief's mind there flitted a remembrance of his boyhood days, when he had seen an old maiden aunt of forty dress just as did the one before him.

She looked like a most thorough back number, one out of date for many years.

But yet she had uttered that which had at once riveted his attention.

She had referred to the murder of a man of whose death he had just learned.

She had said that she had come to find out for him that which his own men could not do.

Who was she?

What was she?

Unable to solve these riddles, the chief of the Secret Service Bureau became at once deeply interested.

He gazed fixedly into the face of the woman, to read her through, if within his power to do so.

But he found her as hard to read as the Chinese alphabet.

She met his gaze, and her face was unreadable.

So he did the only thing he could do for one who had evidently come there to be of some service to him, and he said:

"Be seated madam, and say how I can serve you, please."

"Now see here, I hain't married, so I'm a miss, and you can't serve me, and therefore the boot is on the other leg—oh! I mean limb!" and she lowered her head modestly, while she added:

"Now here's my card."

The chief took the huge piece of pasteboard she handed to him and read what was engraved thereon.

It was simply:

"DICK DOOM,"

"Ferret of the Golden Fetters."

CHAPTER VII.

KNOWN IN HIS DISGUISE.

ONE glance at the card and the chief broke out into a hearty laugh, while he said:

"Well, I am sold, Dick Doom, and I admit it."

"I did think that you could never deceive me again in your disguise, but I give it up that you can do so when and where you will, for you are the most consummate actor of character I ever met."

"What a furor you would have made upon the stage."

"Pardon me, chief, but I wished to visit you in disguise, and so I had to carry out my impersonation, as there were others about."

"Had you been alone I would at once have told you who I was."

"It is all right, Dick, and you can play me whenever you please, for it keeps me on the alert."

"Now what do you know about this murder of old Miser Mainhall?"

"Next to nothing, sir, more than that I learned last night the murder would be committed."

"Ha! and how did you learn it?"

"I will tell you just what happened, sir, and in my life of strange adventures it was about the strangest."

Then Dick Doom told the chief of his going to the hotel and of the visit of the messenger.

"You know, chief, for the sake of being able to use my disguises unsuspected, I register as Mr. and Mrs. D. Richards, and pay for board for two and three rooms, a bed-chamber on each side of a parlor."

"This enables me, when disguised as a woman, to go and come at will, you see."

"You are a shrewd one, Doom."

"I must take no chances, sir, upon making any mistake."

"No, you are wise there."

"And yet you see by this messenger coming to my room, and bearing this note, that I am known to the writer of it."

"You think the writer was the messenger?"

"Beyond all doubt."

"And a woman?"

"That is certain."

"And she knows D. Richards as Dick Doom?"

"She certainly does, sir."

"That is bad."

"It is so bad, sir, that I must change my quarters."

"To another hotel?"

"No, sir, I shall go to an apartment house and get a flat."

"That would be best."

"Yes, by seeking one that is well occupied, and where any one going in and coming out will not be noticed."

"True."

"I will ask you to get a good man to seek such a flat, a lower floor one preferred, and pay for it for me."

"Certainly."

"And secure it for Doctor Richard Dickson and wife."

The chief wrote down the name, and then turned to hear what more the young detective had to say.

"Now, chief, I must, though hiding from this mysterious mascot of mine, as she calls herself, seek to find her out, for she knows me, for one reason, and more, she knows of the Gold Ghouls."

"You think so?"

"Does she not warn me to stop tracking them?"

"So she does."

"And does her letter not tell me that another deed of crime will be done by them?"

"You are right."

"And old Mainhall is the victim."

"Yes, for their card was about his neck."

"I tell you, Dick, I do not like the way things are going, for we dare not let the papers get hold of the fact that there is an organized band of men who murder to obtain gold, as we would never be able to track them down."

"Yes, they would make it hard for us to solve the secret, sir, by putting a thousand and one theories before the public."

"Then, too, the killing and murdering of my men, who have been sent on the track of these Gold Ghouls, I have let it be thought it was the work of roughs of the different districts, and not that they were brought down by any clan of criminals."

"It is best to let it be so thought, sir, at least for the present."

"Yet the papers are calling us incompetent and every day I am roughly attacked."

"Success in the end, sir, will wipe out all unkind criticisms against you."

"If success comes."

"It will, sir, for I am now wholly interested in this case, and I must confess that the danger to face, and difficulties, render me the more anxious to ferret out the mystery."

"I leave all in your hands, Dick."

"Thank you, sir."

"But, that I may wholly understand the situation, let me know all about the Sedley Seaton case, and about old Miser Mainhall as well."

"I will tell you all that I know, Dick," and the chief told the story as given in the following chapter.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE STORY OF THE SECRET MURDERS.

"As I understand it, Dick, from all reports brought in to me," said the chief, "Mr. Sedley Seaton was left a fortune which he gained through those who had the claim of inheritance being disinherited."

"He had been a poor man before this streak of good fortune, and at once launched out into a fast life, though he did not spend his money freely, and only spent it on his own pleasures."

"It is said that he was so mean that he even gave the man who left him his vast fortune, a most wretched funeral, and jewed down the bills then presented to him."

"He countermanded the order given by his benefactor, for a handsome monument, and put over the grave a cheap slab only."

"At length, losing by some stocks, and in a speculation, which was followed by a loss through the failure of a bank, he put his money into gold and paper and built a safe in his house for it, where he could watch it himself."

"Of course his actions became known, and that he held in keeping under his own roof a very large sum of money, was whispered about."

"He lived out in the suburbs, in what had once been a grand old house, and kept three servants, a cook, valet and coachman."

"These servants, from all accounts, were shut out of the house every night after dinner, and not let in until the master rose in the morning."

"Then he ate a most hearty breakfast and drove into town, leaving the cook and valet to guard his house."

"He lunched bounteously in the city, enjoyed himself as he thought best, and returned home to a good dinner, for in eating and drinking lay his extravagance, as well as in dressing."

"One morning he was not up at the usual hour, and the servants became alarmed."

"They at last broke in the door, and he was found lying dead in his room, having been killed by a knife-thrust."

"The door was locked, sir?"

"Yes."

"In alarm the coachman drove at once to the nearest station, where, fortunately, I happened to be at the time, and I returned with him, accompanied by a couple of officers."

"I then saw that the locks had been opened by false keys, and the safe had been entered in the same way, evidently an expert having been the one to do the work."

"Sedley Seaton lay dead on the floor, his hands crossed upon his breast, and about his neck, tied with a red ribbon, was a card. Here it is."

The chief took from a drawer a card with black edges, and upon it in red letters were the words:

"FOR LOVE OF GOLD."

"It is just such a card as this that my first assistant tells me he took from about the neck of Miser Mainhall."

"Showing that the same men did the work."

"Oh, yes; those whom my men call the Gold Ghouls."

"Did they get much money, sir?"

"I rather think not, for the books of Sedley Seaton revealed that he had squandered a very large part of his fortune, for it was found out that his main business when visiting the city was gambling, and he lost heavily, I learned."

"Still, the robbers must have secured anywhere from ten to twenty thousand dollars in gold and bank bills, while the property is worth a large sum."

"Did he leave any heirs?"

"Not one that can even be heard of."

"Now as to the miser, sir?"

"Well, old Peter Mainhall was a cross-grained old fellow, who was once a tramp, it is said."

"He disappeared for several years, and when he returned bought the house where he lived, and paid cash for it."

"The house is an old rookery, an old-time mansion, but there are a half-dozen acres about it, and they are worth a hundred thousand, if cut up into city lots."

"The man had money, yet never spent a dollar more than he had to, never gave a cent to charity, and it was said had a large sum hidden away somewhere about the old rookery."

"Do you think he did have?"

"Yes, for he kept no bank accounts, and had at times loaned out money in sums of five and ten thousand dollars at a usurious interest."

"Then his love of gold cost him his life, as did Mr. Seaton's?"

"Yes, Dick, and these two deaths, at the hands of the Gold Ghouls, show that the clan of cut-throats are selecting men as their victims who they know have the ready cash, and leave no one to prosecute a very close search for the murderers."

"It would seem so, sir, and yet they also seem very determined that any one who goes on a search for them shall be killed."

"They do, and that is just the mystery you are to solve, Dick."

"I will, sir; but now let me go to my hotel, change my disguise, and, as the pretended attorney of Peter Mainhall, meet you at his house, and we'll look over the situation there together."

"All right; it is just what I would like."

CHAPTER IX.

THE SECOND WARNING.

AN hour after the departure of Dick Doom, in his disguise as an old maid, the chief was at the house of the murdered man, Peter Mainhall.

He had not had time to look over the situation, when up drove a carriage from which alighted a chipper old gentleman in blue coat and brass buttons, a high black stock, gold spectacles and a high hat.

His face was clean shaven, and his gray hair was worn long.

"I am Lawyer Cortin, sir, attorney for my lamented friend, Mainhall."

"Sad death, sir, sad end, was it not?"

The chief had made up his mind that the lawyer was one of the old school, an old-timer, and was going to be very polite to him, though he had not suspected that the miser had an attorney, when in a low tone came the words:

"Don't let me fool you this time, chief."

"Dick Doom!" gasped the chief, and then he said aloud:

"Yes, sir, I'll show you all that I can about this sad affair," and he led the way into the house.

The old miser lived upon the ground floor, though the upper one would have been more pleasant, while he made use of but two rooms out of the score that were in the mansion.

One of these he used as a kitchen and a dining-room, and the other as a sitting-room, and there he also slept.

He kept no servant, and if he did allow the house to go to ruin for the sake of repairs, he kept his fences in good condition, so that intruders should not disturb him on the six acres that surrounded his abiding place.

"I have summoned a coroner jury, Mr. Cortin, and the milkman who discovered the murder, and the neighbors who knew Mr. Mainhall's mode of life will soon be here, so that you can hear all the testimony," said the chief to the pretended old lawyer.

"Thank you, sir, thank you," said Dick Doom aloud for the detectives present to hear, while in a whisper he said:

"You have the Gold Ghoul's card?"

"Yes."

"Be careful not to let it be suspected that the same ones who killed Sedley Seaton committed this murder."

"I certainly shall."

"You think they got the old man's gold?"

"I can find no trace of their having done so, or having failed to get it."

The chief and Dick Doom then heard what the detectives had to report, after which they went all over the old mansion from cellar to attic.

When they returned to the room where the body lay they found the coroner, his jury and the milkman, with a few of the nearest neighbors assembled.

The coroner's inquest lasted an hour or more, and yet all that could be decided upon was that the dead man came to his death at the hands of a party, or parties unknown, and that the cause of the murder was beyond doubt to obtain gold which the old miser was said to have hoarded up in his house.

The milkman said that he had been paid cash each day for his milk, and that the miser often had a roll of bills with him.

He was known to have money by the neighbors, always paid for his groceries, and many

stories were afloat that he had hidden away large sums of gold.

So the body was given over to the undertaker, and the house was locked up and the key given to the chief, who at once inserted an advertisement in the papers for the heirs, or those who represented the heirs of Peter Mainhall to come forward and take charge of the property in his keeping for those having the proper authority to claim it.

While at the place the detective had made as thorough a search as he could, and had said to the chief:

"Let me have the keys, please."

"You are coming here again?"

"Yes, to-night."

"Be careful!"

"Oh yes, I will be."

"Had I not better accompany you, Dick?"

"No, thank you, chief, for I can work better alone."

"Let me send a couple of men to be near you in case of need."

"No, I anticipate no danger, sir."

The two were about to leave the place, the chief accepting the invitation of Dick Doom for a drive back with him to the town, when a ragged negro urchin came up and said:

"I guesses this be for you, boss."

He handed, as he spoke, a letter to Dick Doom.

In spite of his usually perfect calm, Dick Doom's face flushed and he looked surprised at the letter, for it was addressed.

"FOR LAWYER CORTIN."

"What is it, Dick?" asked the chief, seeing the surprise of the disguised detective.

"See here, sir, how this letter is addressed," and he handed over the envelope, while he read the contents.

They were short and to the point:

"You pay no heed to my warning."

"What more can I say to force you to give up the fatal trail you are following?"

"Heed what I say or your death be upon your own head."

"Your

"MASCOT."

CHAPTER X.

THE MYSTERIOUS MASCOT.

WITHOUT comment Dick Doom handed the mysterious warning to the chief.

The latter read it in amazement, and beneath his breath uttered something that sounded very like an oath.

"Boy, look here," and the detective called to the negro lad, who was slowly walking away, as though disappointed that he had not been given a fee for delivering the letter.

"He came back at the call with a hop, skip and a jump."

"Yes, boss," and his eyes shone brightly.

Dick Doom looked him over, and an adept in disguise he came to the conclusion that the negro boy was the *bona fide* article, that he was his natural self and not playing a part.

He was ragged, very, from his run-down-at-the-heel shoes, to his slouch hat which hung like a funnel over his head.

"Who gave you this letter, sir?" asked Dick Doom sternly.

"I is paid not ter squeal, boss."

"Do you know?"

"No, sah."

"How could you tell then, if you wished to do so?"

"I c'u'dn't."

"Then why were you paid not to tell?"

"Yer see, sah, ther one who guv me that letter told me to give it to you."

"Yes, and who am I?"

"I dunno, sah."

"How do you know that I am the one you were told to give it to."

"'Ca'se she told me ter guv it to ther old gent with ther specs on, and who looked like a old-timer."

"She told you so?"

"Yes, sah."

"A woman gave you the letter, then?"

"Yes, sah," and the boy looked disturbed at having admitted as much.

"What kind of a woman was it?"

"It wasn't no woman."

"You just said that it was."

"It were a young gal."

"Ah! I see."

"Where was she?"

"Standing by the gate yonder."

"When?"

"Half-hour ago, sah."

"Where is she now?"

"I doesn't know, sah."

"Now tell me all you know about that girl, or I will take you with me to the Tombs."

"Oh, Lordy, boss! Don't do that, fer I hain't did nuthin' wrong, 'fore de Lord, I hain't," and the negro boy seemed greatly alarmed.

"Tell me what you know of that girl, then, who gave you this letter."

"Waal, boss, I were a-standin' out yonder, when she come along in a pony cart, and she called me."

"Then she pointed you out and told me to wait and give you that letter, and she'd pay me well if I didn't say who guv it to me fer you."

"Then she did give me a dollar, sah."

"Where is the dollar?"

"Here it is, boss," and he showed a silver dollar.

"Now I'll give you ten dollars to tell me who the lady is."

"Never seen her afore, sah."

"See here, boy."

"Yes, sah."

"Here is a card that will get you admission to this gentleman's main office, and here are a couple of dollars for you."

"Yes, boss."

"You saw the lady and should know her again, and also her dog-cart, so go at once in the search for her, and if you find her, follow her to her home."

"I will, sah."

"Then come and report to this gentleman, and you shall have twenty dollars more."

"Oh, Lordy! I'll change my name ter Vanderbilt, boss, I'll be so rich," and the negro boy grinned in an ecstasy of delight, while Dick Doom and the chief walked toward the carriage the latter had come in to the miser's home.

"Well, Dick, what do you make out of that?"

"Simply, chief," answered Dick Doom, as they were driving back down-town, "that I am a Shadowed Shadower."

"A hunted detective, eh?"

"Yes, sir, it seems so, and the shadower is the more dangerous from the fact that she is a woman."

"Yet means you well."

"So her warnings imply; but do you observe that she has penetrated my disguise now, as she discovered that D. Richards was really Dick Doom?"

"She has indeed."

"But what can be her motive?"

"It is hard to tell what a woman's motive is, chief; but thus far it appears to be to prevent my shadowing down those Gold Ghouls."

"Yes, it is some one who knows you well and wishes to save your life."

"I do not so regard it, sir."

"How so?"

"I have no entangling alliances, chief, no one knows me as I am, and the truth is, the motive of this woman, my mysterious Mascot, if so you will, is not to save me."

"What then?"

"She is in some way allied to the Gold Ghouls, and she fears me, dreads that I may run them down, and so wishes to frighten me off."

"That she knows me in disguise and out, appears a settled fact, and now I will have to throw my shadower off my track or I can be of little service."

"Well, Dick, I am tempted to ask you to give up the case now, knowing what I do."

"Nothing could force me to do so now, sir, knowing what I do," was the determined reply of Dick Doom, and the chief gloried in his spunk.

CHAPTER XI.

"DR. DICKSON" AT HOME.

THE next day the Secret Service chief made a call at an up-town flat house.

He looked along the list of names until he came to one that read:

"DR. DICKSON."

The touch on the bell caused the door to open and he passed in, halting at the first flat on the right.

Another ring and the door opened, and the chief was welcomed by a young and beautiful maiden, and he was starting back, about to apologize for making a mistake in the rooms, when the reassuring words came:

"Don't run off, chief, for I am not half so dangerous as I look."

"Dick Doom, you are the very Old Nick himself."

"Say one of his imps, rather, chief, for I am young, you know."

"Well," and the chief dropped into a chair and gazed with admiration upon what appeared to be a very handsome girl of eighteen, with a

wealth of golden hair, and dressed in exquisite taste.

"You make up as a perfect old maid one day, and now as a young, and I must say, Dick, a very beautiful girl."

"Your disguises are really beyond perfect, while being a ventriloquist, you have a voice for each character, and your facial expressions are marvelous."

"Why, I was sure that I had made a mistake in the flat."

"Oh, no, for here you find Doctor Dickson at home, sir, a retired physician who never practices, for I have already had a professional call which I had to refuse."

"I simply told the janitor that I lived here alone for quiet, but my daughters and sons would visit me from time to time, while I took my meals out."

"This is a new disguise I was trying when I saw you pass the window, so excuse me and Doctor Dickson will be at home in a very few minutes," and Dick Doom left the little parlor and disappeared in one of the rear rooms.

In fifteen minutes he returned, and the chief though expecting a change of disguises, was almost startled by the metamorphosis.

He beheld apparently a man of fifty, with well-rounded shoulders, a slight stoop, fashionably dressed and wearing eye-glasses, while he walked with a gold-headed cane.

"Doctor Dickson at your service, chief," said Dick Doom, with a smile, sitting near his visitor.

"You'll pass, Dick."

"It is necessary in my business that I should, chief; but have you any news?"

"You have seen that the papers are pitching into the police and detective force for not at once capturing the murderers of Seaton, the officers and old Mainhall?"

"Oh, yes, but I don't mind that, for their comments but add spice to the case, so long as they are in blank ignorance of the facts."

"That is the way to look at it, I suppose."

"But I went by daylight all over that deserted house where you saw the young girl."

"With what result?"

"None whatever, Dick."

"Have you seen the little black lad?"

"Yes, he came this morning."

"With any information?"

"He said that he had seen the lady pass him yesterday in her dog-cart, but he could not follow fast enough, and soon after she halted, and a gentleman in a drag came along and the lady got in with him, the groom driving her cart in another direction."

"The boy was wondering which to follow, the lady or the cart, when both got out of his sight."

"Did he describe the lady?"

"Yes, a lady with yellow hair, as he said, and dressed 'way up, which meant richly."

"And the man?"

"A handsome young fellow that looked like a tip-top gent," he said.

"Did he describe the horses?"

"The dog-cart was drawn by a snow-white horse, and the gentleman drove to his drag a pair of yaller horses, same color as the young lady's hair, said the boy, and they had silver manes and tails."

"Such a team should be soon tracked to its stable, chief, as well as the dog-cart with the snow-white horse."

"Will you put several of your men in Central Park to keep a lookout for just such teams and shadow them home?"

"I will do so, Dick, at once."

"Now, have you heard anything to help you?"

"No, for I have been busy getting settled here in my new quarters."

"How do you like them?"

"Just what I wished, sir."

"To-night I will go up to the miser's mansion."

"You did not go last night, then?"

"No, sir, for I knew that you feared harm for me, and so sent men to watch for any danger that might arise."

"Please do not send any one to-night, chief, as you might block my game."

"I will not, Dick, but I really was anxious about you, and am, since the appearance upon the scene of your Mascot and—"

"And there she is!" cried Dick Doom as a drag went by the window, drawn by a pair of dun horses with silver manes and tails, while a gentleman was driving and by his side sat a young and handsome girl with "yaller hair," and whose eyes were riveted upon the place where "Doctor Dickson" had found quarters.

CHAPTER XII.

DISMAL QUARTERS.

As a man of elderly years apparently Dick Doom could not run, and it would never do, to have him seen dashing out of the flat and in hot pursuit of a stylish team.

The chief was too well known to give chase, and so the two were forced to see the drag with its fine team, its handsome driver and his fair companion, go by and on out of sight.

"We are foiled this time, Dick."

"Yes, sir."

"If I had been playing my natural part to-day I could have kept that turnout in sight until I reached a cab somewhere."

"Do you know the man, sir?"

"Never saw him to my knowledge before."

"Nor the lady?"

"She is equally unknown to me."

"You observed that, while he did not appear to observe this house she kept her eyes fixed upon it from top to basement?"

"Yes, but was it not an accident?"

"Oh, no."

"You believe the girl with the yellow hair is your Mascot?"

"Of that I am firmly convinced, chief."

"On account of the team of horses?"

"Yes, sir."

"Might it not be only a coincidence?"

"It might be, chief, yet it is not."

"What makes you think so?"

"Well, sir, you saw that it was a drag?"

"Yes."

"Drawn by two dun horses with silver manes and tails?"

"Yes."

"The driver was a handsome fellow, with mustache as the boy described him."

"True."

"The lady was young, richly dressed, handsome and had yellow hair."

"That is so."

"Then she eyed this house from top to bottom."

"True again, Dick."

"All of these could not be coincidences, sir."

"I half agree with you."

"No, my Mascot is still shadowing me, and she shadows well, for she is posted as to my coming here."

"And she has spies."

"Yes, sir."

"Who have reported that you have come here?"

"Yes, and she wishes to take a look at the house."

"What will you do now?"

"Move at once, sir, and then shadow this house for any shadowers."

"You will leave here, then?"

"I will not report my going to the janitor, simply go to another place, for I can carry out with me what disguises I need."

"Do you wish me to leave this house shadowed?"

"Yes, sir, with two of your best men."

"And when will you go?"

"Since I come to think of it, chief, suppose you put me in charge of Miser Mainhall's property until the heirs turn up?"

"You would go, there?" asked the chief, with surprise.

"Why not, for it is a fairly good place, and you will know where to find me when wanted."

"It may be a good idea, though I dread to have you go there alone, Dick."

"Risk nothing, gain nothing, sir."

"Well, do as you deem best."

"I will have the Park watched for the drag and the dog-cart, and this house shadowed, and, you being in the miser's old rookery, surely we should make some discovery."

"One would think so, sir," answered Dick Doom, and soon after the chief took his leave.

Then the young detective, in his disguise of Doctor Dickson, sauntered forth and stopped in at a large grocery.

Here he bought some groceries, a lamp, oil, candles and a few other things.

These were placed in a wagon, with a quarter of a ton of coal and some wood, a couple of blankets and a mattress, and sent out to the miser's house.

"Do not get there before night, for there will be no one there to receive the things until then."

"Stop at the gate, and the man will meet you there," was Dick Doom's order to the driver of the cheap Express wagon which he had purposely secured to take his purchases.

Having done this much toward establishing himself in the old house, Dick Doom returned to his rooms, packed a couple of satchels, and dis-

patched them by a messenger who called for them.

Leaving the house unseen by the janitor, Dick Doom met the messenger at the spot agreed upon and took the satchels from him.

A walk of half a mile brought him to the miser's home.

The gate was locked, but Dick Doom had the keys and was soon in the house.

The closed blinds kept the light from being seen when he lit it, and he soon had a fire burning and then went out to wait for the Express wagon.

The man arrived as he did at the gate, and simply put the purchases inside for him, after which he drove away.

Then Dick Doom carried them into the house and in an hour's time had set things to rights and made himself as comfortable as could be expected.

He then went outside to see if a glimmer of light could be seen, and was glad to discover that it could not.

From the miser's sitting-room a door opened which led into a hallway, and thence up-stairs and through the old mansion.

Armed with a dark lantern Dick Doom made the rounds of the house thoroughly, and feeling that he understood its rooms, halls and stairway, he returned to his room and sat down to read before the glowing fire which he had built.

One, two, three hours passed, and just as a distant clock was tolling the hour of midnight there was heard a sound of a footfall on the floor above his head and instantly Dick Doom was on the alert.

CHAPTER XIII.

"YOUR MONEY OR YOUR LIFE!"

THE sound of footsteps in the room over his head did not appear to startle Dick Doom in the least.

He had been apparently expecting just such a thing to happen.

Laying down his book he arose and lighted a dark lantern.

Then he buttoned his coat close about him, put on his hat and buckled a belt around his waist.

In his belt were two revolvers easy to get hold of.

Opening the door softly he stepped out into the hall but all was darkness there, for his lantern slide was closed.

Having studied the formation of the house he knew just which way to move and soon came to the stair-door leading to the floor above.

He opened it noiselessly and ascended to the first floor above.

This was the main floor of the house, and upon it were the parlors, dining-room, library and several smaller rooms, all long vacant, unfurnished, damp and dismal.

It was in the library, however, that he had heard the sound of footsteps over his head, and advancing to the large front door Dick Doom found it closed.

He went to the rear of the hall, where there was a large dining-room, and found the door open, while there was a window raised, a large tree growing against the house there, the limbs reaching out so that one could step from them into the room through the window.

"Yes, as I suspected, in looking over the house with the chief, this is the way they entered, and there is certainly a secret safe in the library where the old miser kept his gold, and which the murderers failed to get the other night."

As he spoke to himself the detective leaned out of the window, when a voice below called out:

"Did you find it, Dick?"

"Yes, it's all right."

"Keep quiet and stay where you are," responded Dick Doom with promptness and nerve, while to himself he mused:

"There is one below, that is certain, and I heard two different footfalls over my head."

"I may have to deal with more than I counted on; but I am in for it now, so will face what comes."

He then quietly awaited for whatever was to turn up.

He had come to the conclusion that there was a secret repository in the library, and that the murderers of the miser, having failed to get his gold the night of the tragedy, had returned to do so now.

What he had seen in going over the house with the chief he had kept to himself, but he had made up his mind that, though the body had been found in the living-rooms of Miser

Mainhall, he had not been killed there, but in the library above.

His reason for thinking so was that he had seen red stains upon the library floor, and the lower stairs, and there was an indication that they had been washed out, or that an attempt had been made to rub out the stains.

The opinion of Dick Doom had been, from his examination of the library, that there was a secret safe in one of the many panels found there, and the robbers knew this, and were searching for it when Miser Mainhall hearing the noise overhead had run up to protect his gold and thus had met his death.

Watching the night before and seeing the men sent there by the chief, for his protection, the robbers had not made an attempt to find the treasure.

But seeing no one on that night they had decided to enter the old rookery and find the miser's gold.

How many he had to deal with Dick Doom did not know, but he suspected there were only two in the library and he knew that there was one man at least outside.

The advantage of a surprise was upon his side however, and he stood by the dining-room door which he could close and lock quickly, if there were too many for him, and he would be in the darkness, while they would doubtless have a light with them to find their way.

So he took up his position, his dark lantern held in his left hand ready to flash upon the robbers when needed, and his right hand grasping his revolver.

Thus he waited for a long while, when suddenly there was the glare of a dim light out in the hall and two men came out of the library.

One carried a lantern, the other had a heavy weight upon his shoulders.

They came rapidly toward the dining-room door, and when within a few paces of it, suddenly rung out, stern, threatening and startling:

"Hold!"

"Your money or your life!"

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE VERY NICK OF TIME.

THE startling demand of Dick Doom, there in that dreary old mansion, in the dead hour of night, brought a cry of alarm from the lips of the two men who were thus brought to bay, followed by a shot from one of them, he who held the lantern, with the words to his comrade:

"Fly, Dick, out of the front door with your booty!"

"I'll make a stand until the boys come!"

A shrill whistle for aid was given at the same time, and a shot came from the man who carried the treasure directly, at Dick Doom.

It was answered with fatal promptness, for the man gave a loud cry and fell, the treasure-bag striking the floor with a heavy, ringing sound.

At the same moment the other man made a spring and clutched with Dick Doom just as another appeared in the window with a bright lantern and half a dozen voices were heard within.

By the light of the lantern the room was made as bright as day and the man in the window called out:

"Come, men, for it's only that young detective, Dick Doom!"

A suppressed cheer answered this information, and the men were ascending the tree by a ladder, when loud and clear came from within the mansion, the warning cry, and in a woman's voice:

"For your lives men, fly!"

"There are dozens of officers bidden in the house!"

With cries of terror the men clambering into the room dropped back, just as Dick Doom, struggling with his powerful adversary, beheld a woman's form in the hall and heard her cry:

"Come, Clyde, or all is lost!"

The man, with a mighty effort of strength hurled Dick Doom from him and fired a shot at him as he fell, while, dragging the door to after him as he rushed out he ran along the hall toward the front door.

But, quick as a flash Dick Doom was upon his feet and seizing his lantern he threw open the door.

As he did so he caught sight of the man and woman flying along the hall, and he shouted:

"Halt, or I fire!"

But as the words left his lips a sharp report rung out, echoing through the mansion, and the bullet striking his lantern, dashed it to pieces in his hands, and all was darkness.

"Well done, Violet!"

"That shot killed him," cried the man, but the words followed from the woman:

"No, I fired at the lantern, not to kill him!" And they were gone, while Dick Doom's hand, momentarily stunned by the shock of the bullet striking the lantern, he feared was badly wounded.

Still he dared not let the robbers know there were not others with him, or they would rally and return, and he would not leave the bag of treasure, so he shouted:

"Come, men, or they will escape!"

"Surround the grounds as quickly as you can!"

If the robbers had halted, this hastened them on in flight, and Dick Doom was left in the silence and desolation of the old mansion with a dead man lying near and the bag of booty at his feet.

Feeling about in the darkness for the bag, he first came upon the body.

The touch did not startle him, and he placed his hand over the heart.

"He is dead," he muttered.

Then he found the bag of booty, and raising it to his shoulders, for it was bulky and weighty, he made his way down the basement stairs to the rooms below.

He felt relieved, nervy as he was, when he opened the door and found himself in the cheery light of the room, and laying the bag upon the table, he looked to his hand to discover just how badly he was hurt.

It was cut slightly here and there with glass, and he said:

"Ah! that is nothing, but it was a close call."

"So the man called the woman Violet?"

"And the letters on the handkerchief I found in the deserted house were V. V.?"

"Then, too, the woman could shoot, and why was it not she who fired the shot that night which saved my life?"

"She did not fire to kill me, she said to the man, only to smash my lantern, and that she did."

"She saw that it was held off at arm's length and darkness was what she wished before I could fire."

"Who is that woman I wonder?"

"My Mascot again, for she did not wish to kill me, and more, her call that there were officers in the mansion stampeded the men and saved my life."

"They know me, that is certain, and it is my duty to return the compliment and get acquainted with them."

The "Now to go up and get that body, for this his boy's haunted house they say, and it may be like a bird's nest," and Dick Doom smiled blandly.

"But the superstitious thought that flashed through his mind."

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CHAPTER XV.

THE BURGLAR'S BIBLE.

Dick Doom locked his door behind him and crept cautiously and noiselessly up through the darkness to the floor above.

In spite of his remark about the house being haunted, such superstitious gossip held no terror for him.

He knew that he was there in that dreary old rookery, the nearest habitation to which, where any one dwelt, was all of an eighth of a mile distant.

The shots even had not been heard, and if so, had not been heeded by any one coming to the rescue.

It might be that the robbers knew this and so had halted, perhaps returned.

Dick Doom knew wholly the risk that he ran, yet he wanted to secure the body of the man he had slain.

So he crept along the hall to the door of the dining-room.

It was closed.

Had he closed it behind him or not?

He believed that he had.

But he failed to remember whether he had or not.

He opened it with extreme caution, with his left hand, while he protected his body by standing beyond the opening.

In his right hand he grasped a revolver ready for instant use.

The door swung open with a creaking sound which grated upon his ears.

Then he stood and listened for the slightest sound.

None was heard.

Still he remained listening attentively, until he felt that if any one was there some movement would have betrayed them to his keen hearing.

He well knew that the body of the dead man lay within the grasp of his hand almost.

But Dick Doom was not to be caught in a trap if he could avoid it.

So he crept on his hands and knees into the room, each hand grasping a weapon.

He came to the body of the slain robber and passed his hand over the upturned face.

It was growing cold and clammy in death.

Believing that the robbers had not dared return, he raised the body in his arms and bore it noiselessly back along the hall and down the stairs.

He unlocked his door and entered, locking it behind him and covering up the keyhole.

The body was placed upon the floor, and drawing a chair up to it the young detective regarded it coolly, though not without an expression upon his fine face which his muttered words revealed the nature of:

"Ah, me! will it always be my bitter fate to have to take life?"

"It is a hard task, be the dead man who he may, to have to kill."

"Poor fellow!"

"Once he was an honest lad, perhaps with ambitions that were blasted, and maybe driven to crime by circumstances beyond his control."

"Now he lies here having met a sad end, killed as a midnight burglar, attempting my life."

"Who is he, and what is he?"

"A loving mother may even now be watching and waiting for his return."

"He is not an ill-looking man, and I pity him, I pity those who love him, for, no matter how evil a man may be there are those in the world who love him, such are the contradictions of human nature, that we must love only the good and the beautiful."

With a sigh that came from his heart, on account of his moralizing, Dick Doom began to search the clothing of the man.

"Oh! the irony of Fate!" he said, as almost the first thing he found was a small pocket Bible.

In it was written in a feminine hand:

"TO MY DEARLY LOVED BOY,

"CHARLIE CROMWELL,

"From his loving

"MOTHER,

"SOUND HAVEN, CONN., June 1st, 18—."

Dick Doom quietly put the little Bible to one side and continued his search.

He found a pocketbook well filled with bills, and this he replaced where he took it from.

There was a watch and chain of gold, a seal ring, a pair of sleeve-buttons and a belt in which was the man's revolver and bowie-knife.

"Here is a man who was robbing for sheer love of it, I would think, for he has here over a hundred dollars, so was not in need."

"I will leave all as I found them, except the Bible, for that I wish."

"There is no need to publish his name and address and hurt those who care for him, and I take it they little dream he is an evil man."

"No, I will take the little Bible, and a run down to Sound Haven will tell me who the man is, and perhaps more that I wish to know."

"Now for a night's watch of it, though I hardly think I will be disturbed," and Dick Doom resumed the book he had been reading when disturbed by the footsteps over his head.

CHAPTER XVI.

A SURPRISE FOR DICK DOOM.

The chief of the Secret Service was more anxious than he cared to admit, at the thought of Dick Doom remaining all night in that old rookery.

He rightly supposed that the robbers, if they had been unable to get their booty, as Dick Doom surmised, and hinted to him, would return for it, and he did not like the idea of the young detective being there alone to face them if they did return.

So he arose bright and early, ordered his carriage, and telegraphing for an officer to come and accompany him, drove out to the miser's mansion, which had become more than ever a spot of interest to those who dwelt in the neighborhood, and to be avoided the more also.

It was just sunrise when he drove up to the gate and met Dick Doom on his way to the nearest telephone to send him word to come up there.

"Ah, Dick! it's a great relief to find you here, for I feared harm had befallen you," said the chief, as he got out of the carriage and approached a man of apparently middle age, dressed in a blue suit, brass buttons, and wear-

ing a blonde wig and beard, but who he knew was the young detective.

"Thanks, chief, but I am O. K., though I had a close call of it."

"Ah! you had trouble, then?"

"Yes, sir."

"Let your man go for a coroner and some of your men, while you come up to the house with me."

"I do not care to be known in this matter other than as one of your men whom you placed on guard here."

"You know best, Dick."

"But there is game for the coroner here, then?"

"Yes, sir, a poor devil whom I had to kill, for he was trying to do as much for me."

The chief went back to his carriage and gave a few orders, and the coachman drove rapidly away.

Then he went with Dick Doom back to the mansion, and unlocking the door, they entered the lower room.

The chief gazed at the dead man, whose hands were peacefully folded upon his breast, and then said:

"Well, Dick, you do most surely do your work thoroughly."

"Why not, when one has to?" was the almost petulant response.

"You have had a hard night of it here?"

"No, for I read all night."

"But I have something else to show you."

"Another body?"

"Is that one not enough?"

"Yes, but I hardly know what to expect."

"As I was going to leave the house, I hid it away, for I hardly expected the body to be stolen."

"Come with me."

He led the way up to the floor above and into the library.

There he stood and told the whole story.

"They left the secret panel ajar, and here it is, sir."

"I studied its spring and manner of opening, so put the bag of booty back in there for safe-keeping."

"See!"

Dick placed his hand against a panel as he spoke, and pressing upon what appeared to be an ornamental piece of carving as he did so, the panel slowly moved from its place, one end swinging inward like a door.

But a cry burst from the lips of the young detective which fairly startled the chief.

The space behind the panel revealed an iron closet, some three feet in height and as many deep, and two in width.

It was set in the solid masonry of the chimney, an iron strong-box thus built in, and in it were a couple of lock drawers for minor articles of value and shelves for larger ones.

But the strong-box was empty.

The chief gazed at Dick Doom and saw that for the first time in his life he was unnerved.

He saw that his face was as white as the face of the corpse in the room below, and the hand trembled that grasped the massive iron sliding-door.

"My God, Dick! what ails you?"

The chief gazed in astonishment at the young detective, who, but for his startled cry had uttered no word.

"The place is empty!" at last gasped the detective.

"Well, that means that the robbers did get the old miser's booty, that is all."

"That is not all."

"Have you forgotten that I told you that the man I killed carried a large bag of booty?"

"Yes."

"Well, I looked through it last night, and this morning, after daylight, brought it here for safe-keeping."

"Not half an hour ago I left it here, and now it is gone," and Dick Doom seemed indeed to have been dealt a severe blow by the discovery he had made.

CHAPTER XVII.

NO CLUE.

The chief was now as much astounded as was Dick Doom, at the loss of the treasure.

At last he got him to tell the whole story over again, and then said:

"See here, Dick. I understand your situation exactly, but let me tell you one thing."

"Yes, sir."

"You must not include in your testimony to the coroner, anything about the lost booty."

"Why not, sir?"

"Well, I know you, but you are in disguise to others, and they do not know you."

"They would say that you hid the treasure, that it was not stolen, and that you—"

"I see, sir, and I thank you; but being innocent I am wholly unwilling to hide the robbery of the booty."

"But I say no."

"Why?"

"Well, I wish you to remain in this matter, as you desire, and free to do this work."

"With the charge against you that you have the lost booty, you would be hampered in your work, perhaps even put under arrest."

"I see your idea, sir."

"So make your written report to me of the affair, and I will hand it in to the coroner, stating that I do not wish you known in this matter."

"Sign it as Richard Dickson, and at once depart from here, and return to-night, if you will, for I will give the coroner to understand that I will keep a man on duty here."

"I see, sir."

"Say that seeing the men with the booty you demanded their surrender, and when you did so they opened fired upon you."

"You returned the fire, killing one man, and they fled, you remaining on the scene until ordered away by me."

"Now go down-stairs and write your testimony, as I have directed, and then go your way, calling in to see me this afternoon at my office."

"I will be guided by you, sir, in this matter, for I see just the position in which I can be placed."

Going down to the room which he had made his quarters, Dick Doom made out his statement as the chief had directed him to do, and then took his departure.

Hardly had he gotten out of his gate when the coroner and jury arrived accompanied by officers of the Secret Service whom the chief had sent for.

The field was worked carefully over, and the statement of "Richard Dickson," accepting the word of the chief that he was a man in whom he had implicit confidence, and that he would not let him appear personally as his usefulness in tracking the robbers would be lost, but promising, if there was need to do so, he would produce him in good time.

The coroner and his jury could find only that the dead man, attempting to rob the premises of the late miser Peter Mainhall, and being one implicated in his murder some nights before, had met his death at the hands of Richard Dickson, an officer of the law on duty there, and who had foiled the attempt at robbery.

Recommending that officers of the law be kept in the dead miser's home the jury departed, and the body of the dead burglar was sent to the Potter's Field for burial, with name unknown.

Of course the affair created a stir, and the miser's mansion became more than ever a place to be avoided and of deeper interest, and people were constantly seen passing by it, looking with morbid curiosity at the house with such a fatal and weird record.

The afternoon papers came out in an attack upon the utter inefficiency of the Police Department, pitched into the Secret Service Bureau as being incompetent, and asked when and where the "murder epidemic" would end.

During the afternoon Dick Doom, still in disguise, dropped in to see the chief.

He found him looking over the evening papers, and in spite of his knowing that he was doing his duty, he wore a troubled look.

"These papers are very bitter toward us all, Dick, but yet what more can we do?"

"Rome was not built in a day, chief, and it will take time to ferret out this Gold Ghoul work of devilry, yet we'll do it."

"Anything new?"

"I shall return at dark to the miser's mansion."

"Not alone this time, I hope."

"Oh, yes, sir."

"You know that there must be some one in that house."

"Yes, it would seem so, for they saw me put that bag in the strong-box."

"And yet you persist in going alone?"

"Yes, sir, for I work better alone, and to-night I shall search that old rookery from cellar to attic," was the determined reply of Dick Doom.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ON WATCH.

"Dick," said the chief after a pause.

"Yes, sir."

"You say that the woman was there with those robbers?"

"She was, sir."

"Your Mascot?"

"Yes."

"You are sure that it was she?"

"I recognized the same rich voice of the woman whom I saw in the doorway of the deserted house, sir, and it was the same one who called upon me at the hotel in the disguise of a messenger-boy."

"Well, you are a close observer and should know."

"And you think she again saved you?"

"I am sure of it."

"She fired at your lantern?"

"Yes, sir, and to save the man with her, whom she believed I intended to kill."

"And she was right?"

"Yes, I intended to bring him down, sir."

"It was the mysterious Mascot who called the men off?"

"Yes, sir."

"Believing that there were officers in the house?"

"No, she knew there were none."

"How so?"

"Why had they not come to my aid if there?"

"True."

"The men did not consider this, but my Mascot did, and she gave the alarm."

"To save you?"

"For nothing else that I can see, sir."

"What strange motive has she for thus protecting you, thus shadowing you?"

"That is just what I am going to find out, sir."

"If you live."

"Yes, if I live," was the cool rejoinder.

"Now tell me what that woman was doing in a scene of burglary in that old mansion?" the chief said thoughtfully.

"My vanity, sir, suggests that she knew I was there, or suspected I might be, and so went there to protect me, which she did," and Dick Doom laughed.

"It may be."

"Well, I will be up early in the morning to see you, and I sincerely hope if you have to do any killing to-night you will get the leader of the Gold Ghoul—if the man you did kill was not he."

"No, he was not the leader, sir, for he went with the woman."

"How many in all were there?"

"I should say five, or seven, counting the dead man and the woman."

"No one recognized the dead man, for my face expert was there."

"I wish to say, chief, that those Gold Ghoul appear to me to be of a better class than the ordinary burglars, sir."

"That has struck me also, Dick," was the chief's answer, and he added:

"Try and capture your Mascot if you can."

"Oh no, sir."

"Why not?"

"If I do I lessen my chances of escaping from death, and I know, if a prisoner, she is not one to betray the band she evidently is a member of."

"I guess you are right," the chief answered thoughtfully.

"Yes, you are right, as you always are, Dick."

"Work out your salvation in your own way," and the young detective took his leave.

He ate dinner at a restaurant down-town, and managed his time so as to reach the miser's house just at dark.

The chief had given him the key, so he slipped in quietly, put more coal on the fire, lighted his lamp, and proceeded to make a survey of the premises before it got any later.

He began with the cellar and was an hour in the damp and gloomy underground place.

But he made no discovery.

Then he took the basement floor and this resulted without any discovery.

The first floor above followed, and there on the dining-room floor was the stain of blood from the tragedy the night before.

The library was examined, and every panel in the wall was tried to see if it too held a secret.

But no other panel moved at his touch, and the secret one he closed.

Then he went to the floor above, and the result was the same—a fruitless search.

The attic was the last.

In it were some boxes, a group of old, dilapidated furniture and nothing more.

Then the thought flashed upon Dick Doom that the one who had robbed him of the treasure might be some person in hiding the night before, and not one of the Gold Ghoul band.

If so, the Gold Ghoul might again return, as no notice of the booty had been made in the papers, and they would suppose that he had kept it there.

So back to the library he went and determined to go on guard on that floor of the old house.

Descending to his room he took some blankets and a pillow, and camped out in a niche of the hall above, his dark lantern lit, and by his side, yet giving out no ray of light.

Tired with the loss of rest the night before he sunk to sleep, and when he awoke it was with a start, for a voice was calling his name.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MYSTERIOUS LETTER.

THE chief arose earlier than was his wont, for he was was anxious about his young friend Dick Doom.

He called for his carriage and was driven rapidly out to the miser's mansion.

The sun was just rising as he dismounted at the gate and hastened up to the rookery.

He saw that the door was closed and upon it was a white paper pinned.

It was an envelope, sealed and addressed, in a feminine hand to

"DICK DOOM,

"Detective."

A string was tied to it, and so across the door, that when the young detective came out he would have to pull the letter down and thus not fail to see it.

The chief knocked at the door but got no response.

He became alarmed and going around to the tree near the house, mounted the ladder and got into the dining-room window, which was raised.

He passed out into the hall, and there, in the little space near the stairway, beheld Dick Doom quietly sleeping.

With several nights' loss of rest the young detective had been utterly worn out and was fast asleep.

"Ho, Dick Doom!"

In an instant Dick Doom was upon his feet and his revolver in hand.

"Ah, chief it is you?"

"Yes, Dick."

"And you caught me, asleep on my post of duty?"

"I do not wonder, as you have had no rest the past week."

"I explored this old shanty from cellar to attic, and went on watch here at midnight."

"With what result?"

"I have not wakened since I lay down."

"You found nothing suspicious about the house?"

"Not a thing."

"The ghosts have not disturbed you?"

"They might have carried me off, the way I slept," said Dick, laughing.

"Well, they have been about."

"The ghosts?"

"No, the Ghoul, I guess."

"Ah!"

"Here is a letter I found pinned upon your door down-stairs."

"Ah!"

Dick took the letter and gathering up his blankets the two descended to the rooms below, where it was warm.

The fire was freshened up, and then Dick sat down and opened the letter he had received in such a mysterious manner.

He broke the seal, for it had one, and on it was stamped the letter V.

Then he read it aloud, and it was as follows:

"DICK DOOM, Detective:—

"Sir:—I have given you warnings, and I have endeavored to save you from death, yet you heed not the one and appear to fear not the other."

"This persistence on your part can but end in one way—your death."

"You are tracking men determined and desperate, and who are also as surely on your track as you are on theirs."

"They know what your powers are as a ferret, and fearing you they seek to kill you."

"De crimed to have gold, cost what it may to get it in life, they seek to put you out of the way."

"They did not know that you were at the miser's mansion last night, so came for their booty."

"They do know that you are there now, have taken up your quarters there, and to-morrow night they will strike."

"Be warned, and do not remain longer."

"I seek to save you for a motive I will not explain; but you make the task a difficult one, as you are a hard one to shadow, and you will not heed my warning."

"If you do not heed this time you are lost."

"Be warned in time or death is certain."

"Your

MASCOT."

"Well, chief, what do you think of that?" asked Dick Doom when he had read the letter through, his face revealing not a shadow of anxiety at what had been written him.

"I hardly know what to think, Dick.

"Let me see the letter."

Dick handed it over, and the chief said:

"Why, here is a postscript."

"Read it, sir."

The chief did so:

"I write this letter at my home, and to show you that you are not infallible, I will take it and pin it upon the door of your room."

"She's a plucky one," said Dick, admiringly.

"She is."

"But who can she be?"

"I have not the remotest idea, I am sure, sir."

"Well, Dick, I wish you to do me a favor."

"What is that, chief?"

"Heed this warning."

"No, I cannot do that."

"I really dread that your death will be the end of all this, and I will put my whole force to run down these fellows if you will withdraw from the work."

"My dear chief, you do not know me, when you ask me to do such a cowardly act as to withdraw from a duty because my life is in danger."

"No, sir, I am in it to stay, or go under," was the fearless response of the young detective.

CHAPTER XX.

A CHARGE OF THEFT.

On his way to the old rookery the chief had bought all the morning papers, and, as he was now assured that Dick Doom would not withdraw from the trail of the Gold Ghouls, he said:

"Here are papers, Dick, so we will look them over together, and I suppose they are full of attacks against me."

"It would not surprise me," and Dick picked up a copy of the *Herald*, when his eyes almost instantly fell upon something that startled him, for he cried:

"Listen to this, chief."

The chief was all attention at once, and Dick read aloud:

"NEW YORK, March 4th, 18—.

"EDITOR HERALD:—

"Sir:—I observed in the afternoon papers of today that an officer of the Secret Service Bureau had been stationed at the old Rookery known as Miser Mainhall's mansion, to entrap the murderers of that old man, should they return to gather in the booty which they had failed to secure the night of the murder."

"Now in all of the reports, and I read every paper and the coroner's inquest, not a word was said as to this booty."

"This leads to the conclusion that none was found, whereas a bag of booty was secured, and it was the man who carried it that this unknown officer of the Secret Bureau shot down."

"Why did he not report the finding of this booty, or rather that he secured it?"

"Simply that he might keep it for himself, as he has done, for he hid it away to enrich himself at some future time, when this noise of the affair had blown over."

"Being the one who got that booty, who packed the bag which this unknown officer of the Secret Service secured, I copy from my own inventory the articles it contained, and which are as follows:

"A set of solid silver table service, of fifteen pieces.

"A silver water pitcher.

"Six silver quart tankards, or mugs.

"All of these were old style.

"Six dozen silver forks.

"Three dozen silver table spoons.

"Six dozen silver dessert spoons.

"Six dozen silver teaspoons.

"One ladle, fish and pie knife.

"All solid silver, massive and of great value.

"One set jewelry, gold and pearls.

"One set of emerald jewelry.

"One lady's watch and chain.

"One gent's ditto.

"A buckskin bag of old coins, worth much as rare pieces.

"A leather bag of five thousand dollars in gold.

"A leather wallet containing some stocks, bonds and seventeen thousand dollars in cash.

"There was in addition some gold nuggets of considerable value, in fact the articles reserved by this officer of the Secret Service would bring all of fifty thousand dollars."

"I naturally regret the loss we have met with, after having to kill old Miser Mainhall, but I am determined that the officer of the Secret Service who killed my pal, shall not secretly benefit by salting these valuables away for his own future reference, and herein I inform you of the exact situation, and I know that it will mean that the dishonest unknown will have to disgorge and go himself behind prison walls."

"With respect,

"A HUNTED MAN."

The chief gave a long whistle when Dick had said this, and asked:

"Well, what do you think of it?"

"He is a smart one."

"He is determined you shall not benefit by the booty he was forced to give up, Dick."

"That is not all, sir."

"What else?"

"He is determined to get me jailed."

"He cannot do that, for I shall explain to the proper authorities exactly the situation."

"No, don't do that, sir."

"Why not?"

"Well, I was going to say that it would spoil all; but the best thing for you to do is to put one of your own men in the Tombs, as one accused, and I'll pay him for his time well, only explain to him that there is no charge against him."

"I see."

"That will, in the eyes of the public, get your unknown Secret Service man in jail, and I'll still be free to work my little racket, for I've got to catch these Gold Ghouls now to clear myself of the charge of stealing that booty."

"Very true, Dick."

"Now I'll keep in hiding here to-day, and plan as I think best, and you at once make the arrest of a man whom you think best to select, and let the afternoon papers get the news of the arrest, following at once on the expose of the *Herald* this morning."

"And you will remain here?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good!"

"We'll yet show the public that we were not asleep, Dick, but on the alert, while those Gold Ghouls, believing you to have been juggled, will be bolder in their actions and give you a chance at them."

"I hope so, for I am most anxious to make the acquaintance of that gentleman robber who signs himself A Hunted Man," was Dick Doom's reply.

CHAPTER XXI.

DICK DOOM'S VIGIL.

THE afternoon papers came out, copying the letter of "A Hunted Man," and with the information that the chief of the Secret Service Bureau had promptly arrested the accused officer, and he was then in the Tombs.

There were comments of course made that an avowed murderer and burglar should go into print to explain how an officer had secretly held the booty he had gone to rob the dead miser's house of, and that he should so well secrete himself that the detectives could find no trace of him.

There was a sign upon the gate leading into the miser's home which read:

"NO ADMITTANCE!"

This kept out the crowd that would like to have visited the old mansion, and all day long many were passing and repassing that way.

Dick Doom, when he saw from his point of lookout that no one intruded, determined to once more search the mansion, and in broad daylight.

He felt that if the treasure had been taken, from where he had placed it, then the one who took it had done so within the time of half an hour, and after daylight.

It had been taken from the time that he put it there and had returned with the chief.

This meant, in fact could mean nothing else, than that the thief had seen him put it there.

At last he had seen him carry it into the room.

The thief also knew the secret spring of the panel in the chimney, that was certain.

If he had seen him there, then he was certainly in the mansion.

But where?

Were there secret hiding-places which he had not found?

There must be.

The thief too must have either been in the house during the whole night, or he had remained when the other robbers ran off.

Then the thought came to the detective that the thief could not have been one of the Gold Ghouls.

If so, he might as well give up the hope of finding that booty.

The thought placed the young ferret in a fever of dread, for he muttered to himself:

"I am ruined if I do not clear myself of this charge against me."

He went then to the library, and began to search it most thoroughly.

He examined the walls from the floor to as high as he could reach, and yet found no place where he suspected there was a secret door or closet, excepting the one in the chimney.

But then that looked just as did the other

panels, so there might be one there and he be unable to discover it.

From the library the ferret went again over the house, and his search was kept up until it grew dark, but without results.

Then he went to his room, kindled his fire, got supper and sat down to read.

All was darkened so that no light streamed outside, and he kept his ears open for the slightest sound coming from without or within.

As it grew later he lighted his dark-lantern, put out the lamp in the room, and went up into the house.

He leaned out of the open dining-room window and listened for a long while.

No sound came to him save the distant rumbling of wheels over the paved streets of the city.

He then got out upon the limb and descended to the ground.

For a long while he stood there.

Then he made a cautious circuit of the house, looking everywhere for a foe.

But in vain the search.

At last he decided to return to his room, and did so, for he had the outdoor key in his pocket, as well as the one of the door leading into the hall.

He cautiously entered the room, and as he did so he halted suddenly.

Distinctly over his head came the sound upon the floor as though something heavy had fallen.

There was no mistaking what followed, the quick movement of feet crossing the room.

Hastily locking the door behind him, Dick Doom ran across the rooms and opened the door into the hall.

This, too, he locked behind him, and ascending the stairs with quick, noiseless steps, he stepped into the upper corridor, crossed it to the library, opened the slide of his dark-lantern, and threw open the door, his revolver ready for use.

CHAPTER XXII.

ANOTHER SURPRISE.

BEFORE he threw open the library door Dick Doom had set his lantern close to it on the floor, so arranged that the bull's-eye would throw a stream of glaring light into the room.

He stepped to one side as the door was open, knowing that he could not be seen in the line beyond the gleam of light, while he could command the entire room from his point of observation.

To his amazement the light shone into an empty room.

And yet he had distinctly heard footsteps there as he came up into the upper hall.

The party in there must be concealed behind the door, or close to the wall upon either side, where he could not see them without looking in. "Come out, or I will fire!" he called out sternly.

There was no sign of acquiescence.

There was no sound.

"I'll give you a minute to obey."

"Then I open fire."

But the moment passed and not a sound was heard.

Unable to longer stand the suspense Dick Doom bounded into the room his revolvers grasped for a death-struggle.

But the glaring bull's-eye of the dark lantern shone on empty walls.

No one was in the room.

Dick Doom was certainly amazed.

What had become of those whose footsteps he had heard?

Who was it that had been there and had dropped something heavy upon the floor?

How had he, or they, escaped?

They could not leave as he came up the steps without his seeing them.

Bewildered Dick Doom paced the room, not knowing what to do.

At last he decided to go to the room below and get what rest he could.

It was nearly midnight, and he could get half a dozen hours of sleep before dawn.

"If I could be brought to believe in ghosts I certainly would believe this house was peopled with them," he muttered as he closed the bull's-eye lantern and went down-stairs again.

He turned his lamp down low, threw himself upon the cot where the old miser had slept, but where he had spread his blankets, and was soon fast asleep.

He awoke with the dawn of day, though no ray of light penetrated his room.

Making his toilet he opened the door to look out at the early morn.

Across it was a string, and one end was attached to a letter pinned upon the door.

Just as he made this discovery, for the sun was peering up now above the horizon, he saw the chief approaching.

The eyes of the chief had fallen already upon the letter and he called out:

"Ho, Dick, another epistle from your mysterious Mascot?"

"It would seem so, sir; but I just found it, as I opened the door."

"Yes, it is just as the other was fastened there."

"You heard no one put it there?"

"Chief."

"Yes."

"This house is haunted."

"Ah! you have seen a ghost then!"

"No."

"I don't believe in such things—no one who has good sense does; but I mean the place is haunted by some one whom I cannot lay hands upon."

"Your Mascot doubtless, as the letter you hold in your hand there would indicate."

"Ah, yes; let me read it, sir."

Dick Doom led the way into the house, and the two took seats, and the seal of the letter was broken.

It was addressed just as before and in the same handwriting, evidently a feminine hand and disguised.

Dick read the letter aloud, and it was as follows:

"DICK DOOM:—

"Sir:—All warnings, all threats and entreaties are in vain, for you still stick to the track of the Gold Ghouls like a bloodhound.

"But to show that I have your interest at heart, that I do not seek simply to drive you from the track of the Gold Ghouls, I return to you to-night the treasure taken from you, for I see by the papers that you were suspected of committing a theft, that is, stealing the booty you forced the Gold Ghouls to leave behind.

"The one who wrote to the *Herald* did not know that the treasure had been stolen from you, nor does he know that it is to be returned.

"Let its return prove that I mean you well, and once again let me beg of you to give up the fatal trail you are now following, for it will surely lead to your death, in spite of all that can be done to save you by

Your

"MASCOT."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE RETURN OF THE BOOTY.

THE chief heard this letter with mingled surprise and doubt.

"Dick, where is that treasure?"

"I do not know, sir."

"It was not left outside the door?"

"No, sir."

And Dick Doom made a search without.

"Look out of the hall door."

This was done.

No treasure was there.

Then the chief said:

"Ah! the noise you heard in the room overhead."

They both hastened up-stairs and into the library.

Dick Doom placed his hands upon the secret panel and opened it.

Within the iron safe they beheld a large bag.

"That is the bag," cried Dick.

They took it out, and the chief had the list of things in it, as published in the paper.

Dick Doom also had the list he had made when he first went over the contents of the bag.

So the end was untied, and all were placed upon the floor.

Dick Doom called out the articles one by one, and the chief kept tally.

"They are all here, Dick."

"They are, sir."

"What will you do with them?"

"Turn them over to you, sir, to be placed in your safe, there to await future developments."

"Yes, that is the thing to do with them."

"I will give you a receipt for them."

"Thank you, sir."

"But, chief?"

"Yes."

"The one who brought them back came into this room other than by that door."

"You think so?"

"I know so."

"Well, then some one else lives in the rookery besides yourself?"

"It would seem so, sir."

"And there are secrets about it which I cannot find out."

"Try again, Dick."

"Oh, yes, I intend to."

"I am not disheartened, especially since I have gotten that treasure back."

"I really do begin to feel that the one who befriends me does mean well by me."

"It certainly looks that way, Dick."

"Well, chief, I shall camp in this old rookery, and you had better turn the supposedly-accused man out."

"No, I shall keep him there for appearance's sake."

"Just as you think best, sir; but do you recall that my Mascot knew that I had not been arrested?"

"By Jupiter!"

"That is so, for she came right here."

"Yes, sir, she knew that it was a blind making the arrest that the papers reported."

"She knew that I had not stolen the booty, and she felt sure that I intended to remain right here."

"Yes."

"How does she find you out as she does?"

"I cannot tell, sir, for the life of me."

"See, she first appeared in that vacant house, and saved my life."

"She did."

"She next came to the hotel where I thought no one knew me."

"Yes."

"She found me out in the flat as Doctor Dickson."

"True."

"She followed me here, and saved me from those with her."

"Yes."

"She knows that I was here the next night, and so pinned that letter upon the door."

"Yes, and a second one too."

"She did, as well as gave the little negro the note for me."

"I tell you, chief, I am the worst shadowed man I ever knew."

"You are taking a little of your own medicine, Dick."

"Yes, and I do not particularly relish it, sir," responded Dick Doom with a laugh.

"The question is, how are you going to help it?"

"I'll have to grin and bear it, I guess."

"But let me make a suggestion to you, sir?"

"Certainly."

"Has it come to you that in each of the murders committed, by these Gold Ghouls, they have selected men of like stripe?"

"I don't exactly catch your meaning, Dick."

"Well, sir, Mr. Sedley Seaton lived alone, as it were, for his servants did not dwell with him in the house."

"That is so."

"He was isolated, lived in a rookery, though a better one than this by far, and gave nothing to charity."

"He hoarded his wealth that he did not spend for his own pleasure, or gamble away, and was supposed to keep large sums of money in his house."

"Very true."

"Old Miser Mainhall never gave a dollar to charity, ground down all whom he had dealings with, lived by himself and was known to keep large sums of money in his house."

"Go ahead Dick, for I begin to understand your drift now."

"Well, sir, both men were murdered and robbed by the Gold Ghouls, and mark my words that the next time they commit a like crime they will select for their victim just such a man as was Seaton and Mainhall."

"Now where does such another man dwell?"

CHAPTER XXIV.

NUMBER THREE.

THE reasoning of Dick Doom regarding the peculiar methods of the Gold Ghouls in selecting their victims, struck the chief most forcibly.

He was at once impressed with the idea advanced, and after a moment's thought, said:

"Dick, you are right."

"I see the thing now in the same light that you do."

"That is an organized band of thieves, to carry out their determination to get gold."

"Their motto is for Love of Gold, and they have settled upon a plan to get rid of just such men as a community does not care for, and would neither miss or regret, except for the manner of their taking off."

"They try to frighten off pursuit of them by boldly killing those who seek to track them down."

"I believe, as you say, they are not of the common herd, that they are men who have gone wrong in life and from the upper classes, and will have gold now at any cost, for having sinned and fallen, they care not now what other crimes they may lay up against them."

"The feature I like least in this matter is that the woman seems to be a lady."

"She has loved unworthily doubtless and clings to her lover in sin and shame."

"I have had my men on the watch for the dun horses and they have not yet seen such a team."

"I have had them on the watch for the snow-white pony and the dog-cart, and though one such was found and tracked, it was not the one we wanted."

"How do you know, chief?"

"Well, it belonged to one whom I know."

"Ah! you are sure?"

"Oh, yes, and I know her husband well."

"And I thought that you knew me, chief, and yet you doubted me, I saw plainly, when that article came out in the paper signed by A Hunted Man."

"No, Dick, I—"

"Don't deny it, chief, for I read your face perfectly."

"You did not wish to doubt me, and you trusted me still, yet were determined to keep your eye more closely upon me."

"I must confess, Dick, I hardly knew what to think."

"But I dismissed the doubt as soon as formed."

"Then give me the address, please, of the one who owns the white pony and dog-cart."

"Certainly."

"But you are away off there."

"I may be, but I am in this game to win, chief, and I shall let no page of its history go unread."

The chief wrote down the name and address and then said:

"Yes, Dick, you are surely right in your surmise as to the methods of these Gold Ghouls."

"Now let us find out where Victim Number Three is, chief."

"You mean one who is to be selected for the Gold Ghouls?"

"Yes, doubtless has already been selected, for there is no time for a villain to strike with more safety than just when any one is believing he has fled to escape detection."

"You are right."

"Now, do you know of any one answering to the style of Seaton and Mainhall, chief?"

"Yes, several."

"Will you give me a list of them?"

"With pleasure."

"There is an old woman living up across the Harlem River who is said to be worth a great deal of money and to keep it hidden about her house."

"She lives in a place not unlike this, which she inherited, and she is so mean, they say, that she will not keep a dog to protect her, and refuses to feed her cats, making them forage on the rats for a living."

"Does she live alone?"

"Yes, but gives a room in the house to an old negro and his wife in return for cutting her wood and bringing her what she needs."

"I have been surprised that some one has not gone there to rob her, knowing her unprotected condition, though they say she is a terror, and blazes away with an old musket loaded with buckshot, at the boys who try to steal her apples."

"She is a good case for the Gold Ghouls, according to my idea of them and their ways, for man or woman it would be the same to them."

"Any others, chief?"

"Yes, an old man who lives in a stone house back from the East River."

"He is called an old pirate, for he was a sailor forty years ago, and coming back from one of his cruises bought the house where he now lives, and which has quintupled in value."

"He will not sell a foot of it, keeps off all trespassers with the savage dogs he has there, and owns a little sloop in which he goes down to the city whenever he wishes provisions."

"It is said he always pays in old Spanish gold for what he gets, and rumor has it that he has his private treasure buried there on his grounds, or hidden in his house."

"Then mark my words, chief, either the old woman or the man you call the pirate will be the next victim of the Gold Ghouls—will be Number Three," said Dick Doom impressively.

CHAPTER XXV.

DICK DOOM LEARNS A SECRET.

THE chief left Dick Doom still at the old rookery of the miser, after giving him full particulars of just how to find the homes of the woman and the man he had spoken of.

The young detective had decided to spend the day in moving about and to return by night to still keep a watch on the miser's home.

His first step was to go to Sound Haven, and he did not disguise himself to make this trip.

He took the train for the little village, and upon his arrival there put up at the little inn, where he got a substantial dinner and won the confidence of the landlord by praising it.

"I came down to look up a family that used to live here by the name of Cromwell," said Dick to the landlord.

"Did you know them?"

"I know young Charlie Cromwell and wanted to find him if I could."

"Ah! you are one of his victims too, are you?"

"Oh, no; but why do you ask that?"

"Well, the truth is Charlie was a good fellow, but got to running with a rich young fellow who came down here three years ago for the summer, and who had his yacht and horses."

"Charlie's father had a good home, and practice, for he is a physician, and the young man was a college graduate and had just gotten a place in the little bank here."

"To keep up with the pace of his city friend, Charlie drew on the funds of the bank, and it was found out."

"The young man would have gone to prison, but his father paid all back to the bank, though he had to mortgage his house to do it, and Charlie left for the West, owing any number of bills here."

"But his father paid up every dollar, and now in his old age has to begin life anew, as it were."

"And where is Charlie now?"

"Out West, I heard, though I am pretty sure I saw him in New York a few weeks ago."

"You say he does not owe you anything?"

"Not a dollar."

"His mother is going West soon to look him up, though they say to do so they'll have to put another mortgage of a thousand upon the house."

Dick Doom made no reply other than to say that it would be a pity, and then went out in search of the home of Doctor Cromwell.

"Yes, it is my duty to tell them the truth," he muttered, as he stopped at the gate of a cozy home, surrounded by pretty grounds.

Doctor Cromwell was in and received his visitor pleasantly, asking how he could serve him.

"Doctor Cromwell, my call upon you is one of duty, and also a painful one, for I have to tell you that which will cause you sorrow."

"Of my poor boy?" said the doctor, sadly.

"Yes, sir, for I learn that Mrs. Cromwell is going West to look him up."

"She is to start as soon as we can make an arrangement to raise the money, sir."

"Doctor, she must not go, for your son is not West; indeed, sir, your son is dead."

Then did Dick Doom tell the sorrowing father who he was and all that had occurred, except that he had fired the fatal shot that had killed him.

The doctor was deeply moved and then said:

"I'll tell you, sir, it was Clyde Colton who led my boy astray."

"They had met at college, and Colton was a rich young fellow and very fast."

"He came here for pleasure, yachted, drove fast horses and completely ruined poor Charlie, whom he led into gambling until my son was forced to fly to keep out of prison."

"He went to Colton in New York, and that man wrote me that he had given him money and advised him to go West, and Charlie had done so."

"My wife intended to go and bring him back, forgive all, and see if we could not reform him; but now you tell me he is dead!"

"He is, sir, and he was buried in Potter's Field; but I had the chief exhume the body and bury it in a cemetery, for I felt that there were those who some day would claim the remains."

"Heaven bless you for that, sir."

"I shall tell my wife that he is dead, not how he died, or what he was, for that would break her heart."

"And then I shall go after his body and bury it here in our little graveyard, where two generations of our name now rest."

"I thank you, sir, from my inmost heart I thank you, and when I hear from you, as you say, I will come after my son's body and meet you in the city."

"Now what a coincidence, that Clyde Colton is the name given me by the chief as the man whose wife drives the snow-white pony to the little dog-cart."

"Certainly Clyde Colton ruined the life of

poor Charlie Cromwell, and brought sorrow upon the hearts of his parents."

And so musing, Dick Doom was whirled in the train back to the city.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE VISIT.

ANOTHER night was passed in the old rookery by Dick Doom, and not a sound broke its stillness; and he was undisturbed until the arrival of the chief in the morning.

He had looked out of his door in the early morning, half expecting a note to be pinned there, as on the two previous mornings, but there was none.

He did not tell the chief of his visit to Doctor Cromwell at Sound Haven, for Dick Doom had a way of keeping things to himself unless there were reasons for divulging them, and in this case he alone knew the secret of the young man's life, from having discovered his name and address in the Bible given him by his mother.

He was not the one to let those who had loved the young man feel greater shame in the death of their son than they had known for him while he lived.

So when the chief came upon his regular visit, he said that he had simply been reconnoitering, and intended paying two visits that day.

"Where will you go, Dick?" asked the chief.

"I shall first go and visit the old woman you speak of, sir, and then to see your old pirate."

"What good can you discover by those visits?"

"Well, chief, we came to the conclusion that they were just such persons that the Gold Ghouls were seeking for their victims."

"Yes."

"I can, by talking with them, find out if any suspicious characters have been around, and if so, we can put a force to watch the house of the one which the Gold Ghouls intend to strike."

"To protect them?"

"Oh, yes, as well as to get the robbers in a trap."

"You leave nothing undone, I see, Dick."

"But now I will return to the city, and will see you to-morrow."

"Yes, sir, I will look for you at the usual hour, chief."

"It is useless to say, I suppose, to be careful."

"I am careful enough, sir, never fear."

When the chief had gone, Dick Doom rigged himself out in a costume that gave him the appearance of a peddler.

He took from among his traps a case of goods, of various things, and then started out upon his way to make his two visits.

The first one was to the old woman who had the name of being too mean to feed her cats and to keep dogs.

He was advised by a neighbor, who saw him going into the grounds, to keep on his way, as the man said:

"That old woman is a holy terror, and she'll make it lively for you, as she does for every one else who goes near her."

"She seems to think everybody is after her money."

Dick thanked the man, but went on his way into the grounds.

The old negro man and his wife were off at day's work somewhere, and the mistress of the mansion sat in a chair upon the rickety old piazza.

She was smoking a pipe, and eyed the detective fiercely as he came up.

"Well, what do you want here?" she asked, in a hoarse voice, as Dick drew near.

He stopped, raised his hat politely, and said:

"I will tell you just why I have come, my dear lady, if you will allow me to do so."

There was something in the tone and look of the young detective that choked the intention of the woman to order him off, and she said:

"Well, what do you want?"

"I am no beggar, and I do not wish to disturb you, good lady; but I am here, as you see, to sell goods, apparently, though that is not why I have come."

"You are a peddler, and they are no good."

"I appear to be a traveling salesman, yet I am not, for I am a detective."

"You have no business with me, for I break no laws."

"Very true; but do you read the papers?"

"Yes."

"May I confide a secret to you?"

"Yes."

"You have read that of late there have been two murders committed for the purpose of robbery, one being Sadler Seaton, the other an old miser by the name of Peter Mainball?"

"Yes, I read of both murders, and I have wondered why they did not come here and murder me."

"Ah! that is just it, for the men who committed those two murders are leagued together to kill to get gold, and it is just such unprotected ones as you are whom they seek out."

"Knowing this I came not only to put you upon your guard, but also to ask you if any suspicious-looking persons have been prowling about of late that you have noticed?"

The detective made a good impression, and had won the respect and confidence of the old woman, for she said in reply:

"Come and take a seat and I will tell you all I know about what you say."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE OLD HOMESTEAD.

DICK DOOM went up and took a seat upon the steps of the piazza, while the old woman put her pipe away and said:

"You have heard that I am rich?"

"Yes, it is said so."

"What else?"

"That you keep your money hidden here in your home."

"It is true."

"You do wrong, for there are men about who would not hesitate to kill you, if only to get a few hundreds of dollars."

"I can believe that, for I know how wicked men are."

"But you asked me if there had been any suspicious persons about of late?"

"Yes."

"There have."

"Ah!"

"Will you tell me of them?"

"One man came here four days ago and asked for food."

"I refused him, of course."

"He looked about the place, asked questions, and then, when I got angry with him, he left."

"Yes."

"Yesterday two others came."

"Did they talk with you?"

"Yes."

"Describe them."

"They were in a carriage, with a coachman, and they were a lady and a gentleman."

"They certainly were not suspicious characters?"

"I don't know so much about that, for the gentleman said the lady was taken suddenly ill, and he asked if she could rest here a while."

"And they did?"

"Yes, sir, for she was young and beautiful, with red-gold hair, and reminded me of a daughter I once had, so I was kind to her."

"And the man?"

"Was a handsome fellow, but if not a villain my eyes hed to me, for they said so."

"Well?"

"I might have thought no wrong, but it struck me that the lady was not very ill, and then I recognized in their coachman the man who had been here before as a beggar."

"Indeed!"

"What were the names of the people?"

"I heard him call her Violet."

"Ah!"

"Did you notice the horses they drove?"

"Yes."

"Describe them, please, good lady."

"They were dun horses with white manes and tails."

Dick Doom smiled, and the smile meant a great deal; but he quietly asked:

"Did you hear the lady call the gentleman by name?"

"I think she called him Clyde."

"I see."

"Well, I must be starting now upon my way; but let me say to you that I believe they were, in spite of their fine looks, none other than spies, trying to find out all they could about you and your place, and my advice to you is to hide yourself and your gold by night, for they may come here to kill and rob you at any time."

"Have you a place you can go at night?"

"Yes, I'll be safe, for they cannot find me where I shall go."

"But I thank you and I wish you to come and see me again."

"I will, and should you have a visit from them send word to this address at once," and Dick Doom handed to the old woman a card.

"I'll do it," was the answer and then the detective went on his way to the house of the old pirate, as the chief had said the old sailor was called.

It was a walk of several miles, but he soon made it, and turned into the grounds through a

gate tied securely with a rope, and upon which was the notice:

"WARNING!"

"Beware of the dogs!"

"No one allowed to enter these grounds for any reason whatever!"

"All doing so will be prosecuted to the full penalty of the law."

But the formidable notice did not keep Dick Doom out, he seeming to show fear neither of the dogs or the law.

He boldly entered the grounds, followed the old weed-grown driveway which led amid the trees to the mansion.

Once the place had been a fine old homestead, surrounded by many hundreds of acres, but the growing city encroached upon it until now the house was surrounded only by the grounds about the residence.

These grounds ran down to the waters of the East River at a point where it was very wide, and in the little haven there was lying at anchor a small sloop.

The land had become overgrown with underbrush, weeds and grass, all in keeping with the old tumble-down mansion which was fast going to decay.

Here and there all around the grounds were seen the signs of warning put upon tree and fence, and on posts where the landing was, thus giving fair notice to intruders of the danger in trespassing.

But Dick Doom serenely held on his way up to the mansion, apparently caring nothing for the perils he might have to encounter.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE DISCOVERY.

"THE old pirate and his dogs too must all be asleep," said Dick Doom to himself as he neared the old mansion and saw no signs of either.

He spoke of the old seaman as the neighbors did, for he was generally known as the "Old Pirate."

Approaching the house Dick Doom went around to the side that fronted on the water, which was where the old sailor made his home.

Of course he expected to see half a dozen dogs rush at him savagely, and yet, unlike most men, the detective had no fear of them.

Whether it was magnetism, fearlessness, or what, he did not attempt to explain it even to himself, but certain it was he always had control over dumb beasts from his first meeting with them.

He had faced the most savage dogs before, had them rush at him, and a word would control them, for they would trot along sniffing at his heels.

If they would not be thus controlled, then he had his revolver, and his aim was sure, never missing.

Around the house he went, and there he saw lying, scattered about, three large dogs.

But they remained perfectly quiet, if they saw him.

Certainly they all could not be asleep.

He advanced nearer and then halted.

The dog nearest to him was dead.

Yes, there was no doubt of that, for the dog had a bullet wound in his head.

Quickly went Dick Doom to the other two dogs, and they had shared the same fate as the first.

"I am too late," muttered the detective, and he walked toward the house.

The door was closed, but unlocked, and opening it he entered the living room of the old sailor which was on the ground floor.

It was kitchen, dining-room and sleeping apartment combined, and instead of a bed the old man always slept in a hammock, swung from window to window.

He was in the hammock then.

But Dick Doom did not call, for he knew that was useless.

There was a small red pool upon the floor beneath the hammock which told the story.

The detective at once laid his hand upon the pulse, but found it stilled forever.

"Dead!"

"But this was the work of only a few hours ago."

"They were here last night, and they are the Gold Ghouls."

"I thought of their method too late to save this man."

"Now to see if they have robbed him, or that they have found his treasure."

There was little search needed, for the bricks were torn up out of the large fireplace and beneath was a large hole.

The shape revealed the fact that a box had been buried there and removed.

The box in fact lay in the room, the lid torn off, showing that its contents had been taken out and transferred to something else, doubtless bags brought along for the purpose.

Dick Doom went over the whole place with the greatest of care, and then searched outside until he followed the tracks to the water's edge.

"They came in a boat last night," he muttered.

Among the tracks was one that attracted his attention.

It had a high, small heel and the foot was small and shapely, yet a man's track.

Having made all the search he cared to then, Dick Doom closed the door and left the place as he had come.

Reaching the gate his eyes suddenly fell upon wheel-tracks outside.

The tracks were small, not made by wagon-wheels, and the hoofprints revealed two well-shod horses.

Here, too, was the same high-heeled footprint which Dick Doom had noticed at the landing near the old sailor's house.

Taking a few measurements of the tracks, and studying the style of the horseshoe, Dick Doom then walked rapidly away, and he took the road that would lead him back to the home of the old woman.

"I have come to repeat my warning to you, for one who lives as you do was murdered for his money last night."

"Speak of this to no one, for I have not reported it, only be on your guard, though I dread no attack on you to-night."

"I will, however, if you will give them a room, send a couple of officers here to stay with you, coming after dark, and remaining all night," he said to the old woman, who responded with real feeling in her voice and manner:

"You are very good to me."

"Now I wish to observe the wheel-tracks of the visitors you had two days ago."

He went out and looked at the tracks of the carriage-wheels, and the hoofprints, after which he walked rapidly on his way back to town and just at nightfall reached the office of the chief of the Secret Service.

CHAPTER XXIX.

HEARING THE NEWS.

THE chief was surprised to see Dick Doom enter, for excepting the disguise of a very loud checked suit and blonde wig, he had not made up much, wishing to appear only as a peddler.

"Well, Dick, glad to see you, and I feel sure that you have news by your coming here."

"I have, chief."

"Been disturbed in your lonesome retreat?"

"Oh, no."

"What then?"

"I have been visiting to-day."

"Ah, and who did you call on?"

"The old woman and the Old Pirate."

"I see; and found them at home?"

"Yes, sir."

"But did not like your reception?"

"Oh, yes, the old lady was really very sociable, and we got to be such good friends that I am going to ask you to send two officers there at once to remain all night."

"Let them leave just at daylight, and remain there at night, going just after dark and leaving early, until further orders."

The chief called his attendant, and gave the necessary orders.

The two men were off on their duty within five minutes, and then the chief returned again to Dick and asked:

"Was the Old Pirate sociable also?"

"No, sir, he did not speak to me."

"But his dogs made up for his want of hospitality?"

"The dogs did not notice me, sir."

"In fact, chief, I was a day too late in my theory of the plans of the Gold Ghouls to save the old man."

The chief leaped to his feet with a cry of amazement and alarm commingled.

"Dead!"

"Yes, sir, and robbed."

"You discovered this to-day?"

"I did so."

"Let me hear all that you have to tell, Dick," and the chief seemed greatly worried.

Dick Doom told his story of his visit to the old woman, and what she had said about the tramp's visiting her, and afterward appearing as coachman of a fine carriage.

The illness of the lady and all that followed, Dick Doom told distinctly, after which he made

known his visit to the old sailor and the discovery that awaited him there.

"What do you think of all this, Dick?" asked the chief when he had heard all.

"Well, chief, I connect the visit of the tramp to the old woman with the murder of the old sailor."

"How so?"

"He was a spy."

"But you say he was a coachman?"

"Yes, he was then driving his chief over the scene."

"Ah!"

"You think so?"

"I know so."

"And the chief?"

"Well, sir, the chief has a small foot, wears high heels, and his tracks were very plainly seen about the old woman's house."

"Then they appear again, as do the carriage tracks and hoofprints of his horses, at the gate leading into the old sailor's grounds."

"The gate is securely fastened, but the tracks were there about it, and the carriage halted there and turned just at that point."

"You read signs well, Dick."

"It is my business, sir, to do so."

"I also saw the same small tracks at the landing near the old sailor's house, and leading to his house."

"A woman's footprints?"

"No, sir, a man's, but he has a very small and shapely foot."

"Here is a kid glove I picked up too at the old sailor's, and I believe I can find the match to it."

"Then you have a clue."

"I have a clue, and if it is a correct one, sir, I will give you a very great surprise."

"But, what is the clue, Dick?"

"I never make a charge, or hint of a suspicion against a man until I am sure, sir."

"Well, when will you be sure?"

"I think within the next twenty-four hours, sir."

"But now will you send men up to the old sailor's, for there he lies dead, and no one would even go there believing him to be alive."

"I will go myself."

"Will you accompany me?"

"No, sir, for I have a little work to do and then I return to my quarters at the miser's mansion."

"You know best, Dick, and I will be up in the morning."

Dick Doom now took his departure, while the chief got a band of his men together and drove at once to the house of the old sailor, whose death could only be laid at the hands of the Gold Ghouls, he was sure.

CHAPTER XXX.

A MIDNIGHT VISITOR.

WHEN he left the chief's quarters Dick Doom went at once to the flat which he had engaged as Doctor Richard Dickson.

He went into his rooms without being seen, and half an hour after there came out what appeared to be a perfect type of an English coachman, livery and all.

This individual made his way for some blocks until he came to an alley which he turned into, watching the numbers as he went along by the dim light of the gas lamps.

At length he stopped at the door of a hand some stable and rung the bell.

It was answered by a man, who after some conversation with the visitor, asked him in:

"I have got to send off the groom I have, for he drinks, and that the master will not allow, so if you are a good hand and bring good references, I'll take you, say within a week."

"All right, sir, I'll be glad of it, for I am not afraid of work."

"How many horses do you keep?"

"There are four now, for the master has a pair, and beauties they are, the lady has a pony and then there is a coupe horse for general driving."

"I'll show them to you."

The applicant for the place of groom would be delighted to see them, he said, for he loved horses, and so the coachman led him into the stable and showed him with considerable pride the horses and vehicles he had under his care.

Soon after the visitor took his leave, promising to call again in a few days for his answer, and to bring his references with him.

From the stable he went to the nearest Elevated Railroad station and was whirled rapidly along to the upper part of the city, where he got out and made his way to the house of the dead miser.

All was dark and dreary there, but it held no terror for him apparently, as he passed in through the gate, approached the old mansion and taking a key from his pocket unlocked the door.

He soon had a lamp lit, and the fire burning, and then he set about changing his costume to appear once more as Dick Doom.

Taking up a book Dick Doom had been reading but a few minutes when he was startled by a knock at the hall door of his room.

Some one had certainly entered the house, and he at once thought of a trap to catch him.

He knew no light shone outside, so he remained quiet.

Again came the knock, yet still he did not answer.

"Mr. Doom, I know that you are at home, so please open the door."

The voice was a gentle one, a woman's.

"Yes, I am here."

"Who are you?" and Dick Doom stepped to door, but did not open it.

"Your Mascot," came the reply.

"What do you wish?"

"I am here to see you, to warn you, to save you," was the earnest response.

"From whom and what?"

"Open the door and I will tell you."

"Are you alone?"

"I am."

Dick Doom hesitated an instant, then, with revolver in hand he opened the door.

In stepped a woman in black, veiled and heavily cloaked.

He locked the door behind her and led her into the other room where there was a fire.

"How did you get into the house?"

"Through the entrance door, for there is a secret panel in it working by a spring."

"Ah! you seem to know much of the mysteries of this old house."

"I should, for I was born in this house."

"You?"

"Yes."

She now raised her veil and Dick Doom beheld the face he had seen before.

It was the face of the young girl of the deserted home, of the one he had seen that night upstairs, of the one he had seen drive by the flat with her handsome escort.

It was a beautiful face, yet strangely sad in expression, a face to admire, to fascinate one and to love.

"Who are you?" asked Dick Doom.

"Your Mascot," she answered with a sad smile.

"Somewhere we have met before," he said.

"Yes."

"When and where?"

"Some years ago, when I was a girl of fourteen you saved my life, saved me from being burned to death upon a Mississippi steamer."

"You did so at the risk of your own life, and I never forgot you."

"My father was once a rich man, but he married against his parents' wishes, and was disinherited."

"This was his old home, and he came here to live, and here I was born, and dwelt until I was fourteen, when we were driven out of the place by the purchaser, Peter Mainball, after the death of my grandfather, who was unforgiving to the end and disinherited my father."

"My mother was ill, and, forced to move, it cost her her life."

"My father had obtained work as a detective, and you engaged him in several cases to help you."

"His name?"

"Mark Vertner."

"Ah! he was killed by a crook whom he tracked to his den, and a noble, splendid fellow he was."

"Yes, and I aided him in his work, disguised as a boy, as an old woman, and as whatever else that was necessary."

"I know now that I have heard your father speak of you as his Little Mascot, and girl detective."

"He was always most friendly toward me, as he felt that he owed his life and yours to me on that burning steamer."

"So you are Violet Vertner, are you?"

"I was."

"And now?"

"I am married, though I am just eighteen."

"Yes, and I can tell you that which you little dream of."

"But why have you sought to help me?"

"Because my father and I owed so much to you, and I was in a position to save you from death," was the earnest response of the woman.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE MASCOT'S CONFESSION.

"LET me tell you now," said Dick Doom, looking the woman squarely in the face, "that you are the wife of one of the most clever crooks in the city of New York."

"You know this?"

"How can I help knowing it, for have you not been with him in his deeds of devilry?"

"No! no! no! I am not so bad as that."

"Let me tell you that I know how he has plotted to get gold, and just what he has done."

"Why, you were with him several days ago, when he drove out to look over the situation prior to robbing the old woman living above Harlem."

"Ah! but I did not believe he would be so vile, and it made me ill when I heard of his plot."

"But you know this?"

"As I do that you were with him when, that same afternoon, he drove to the Old Pirate's home."

"Yes, but he did not go in."

"Not then."

"He intended robbing the old sailor, but when I was sure of it I told him I would prevent any more crimes, for I was sick of them."

"I met that man and loved him with my whole soul."

"I believed him noble, honorable, true as steel, and I married him."

"It was not a year before I found out that he was what you detectives call a crook."

"He stood fairly well in society, was a club member, lived in good style, and yet at heart was no gentleman, was evil and plotting for gold."

"He got together a band of unfortunates, who had once seen better days, and organized a league against those possessing wealth who made no use of it for good."

"I was fool enough to believe that I could reform him, and them, and I struggled hard to do so."

"But at last I saw that the task was a hopeless one, that to murder and rob was apparently their delight."

"They murdered Sedley Seaton, and to frighten off pursuit began to kill the officers of the law."

"They had a band perfectly organized, and a spy at Headquarters and among the police."

"Their den, or one of them, is in the old deserted house where you were fired upon that night, for there are rooms in that place you never found."

"And you fired the shot that killed my intended assassin?"

"Yes, for I heard the orders given him to kill you."

"I fired not to kill him, but the bullet went to the seat of life."

"I then spoke to you from the door, for I was waiting in the room for the secret council to end."

"Not one of the band suspected me, and we fled through a secret way from the house."

"I came here to protect you the night the Ghouls came back for their booty, for I knew you would be here."

"I had the reports of the band's spies, who were watching you, and I had my own spies upon you, for I was determined to save you, where they were determined to kill you."

"You have more than canceled the debt of life you owed to me."

"I have done my duty, and let it atone for my crime in being allied to such as I am."

"Now let me tell you who your husband is?"

"You know then?"

"Yes, I know that he drives a pair of dun horses with silver manes and tails, and that you drive a snow white pony in a dog-cart."

"Ah!"

"I know that your husband lives in good style on —th street, and that people do not suspect him of being what he is."

"His own men do not know him as he really is, for he always disguises himself before them."

"I know that he did go with his band and kill that old sailor they call the pirate, and—"

"No! no! has he done this crime?" cried the woman.

"He has, and let me tell you that he is now hemmed in so there is no escape for him, and all I desire now is that you may not share his fate, that you may escape from the toils, for I would save you from the shame and dishonor, the misery and sorrow of being known as the wife of such a man as is Clyde Colton, such a crook, robber and murderer, for he will go to the gallows, while you shall not be dragged down by his infamy."

"Ob, how can I save myself now?" gasped the woman.

"Why did you come here to-night?"

"To tell you that to-morrow night, just at twelve, my husband and his whole band are coming to this place to kill you."

"They know that you stay here, and they will enter the mansion by the secret panel, hide in the hall, and let me tell you that they can enter this room, secure as you deem yourself."

"Do you mean it?"

"I told you that I was born in this house, and I know all of its secrets."

"See here!"

She arose and went to the paneled wall, pressed hard against a certain panel, and it swung open, revealing a space through which a man could readily pass into the hall.

"This can be opened from without as well, and my husband knows all the secrets as well as I, for I told him of them, little dreaming then he meant to use what I said against Peter Mainball."

"The house was built long ago, and my great grandfather had his own ideas carried out in the building."

"It was to warn you of certain death to-morrow night that I came."

"Can I trust you?"

"Wholly."

"Do you love your husband?"

"I despise, I hate him now, when I feel that he is so evil, that he has made me so wicked in hiding his crimes."

"Will you do as I tell you?"

"Gladly."

"Where is your husband now?"

"He is at the council of the band to-night, arranging to come here to-morrow night and kill you, and get more booty hidden here, for he vows there is more, and he intends to look through all the secret recesses."

"He does not know yet that I brought back the bag of booty, which is to be divided on Sunday night with other robberies, and has not yet been missed."

"You will do as I tell you?"

"I will."

"Then go to your home, pack up what you need, and care to take with you, and have all in readiness to leave when your husband departs to-morrow night from his house."

"Yes."

"Have a carriage for yourself and trunks and drive to the depot, taking the train for New Orleans, and I will give you a letter to the chief of police there and his wife, who will welcome you."

"The chief knew your father well."

"Once there you are away from all danger, and you can shape your life differently."

"I will; but Clyde Colton?"

"Leave him to me."

"I will do that too," was the earnest answer of the unfortunate woman.

CHAPTER XXXII.

CONCLUSION.

WHEN the chief returned to his home, from his visit to the old sailor's homestead, where he had left several officers in charge, he was surprised to find Dick Doom in his library awaiting him.

"I have come, chief, to say that you must send word at once to your men at the sailor's home not to be seen all day, but to keep close, for the murder must not come out before the public."

"But why, Dick?"

"Well, chief, because I wish the capture of the murderer to be known at the same time that it is discovered that a murder has been perpetrated."

"Is this possible to do?"

"It is, for I will capture, with your aid, the Gold Ghouls band to-morrow night."

"Grand!" cried the chief excitedly.

"Now, send word to your men, and to-morrow select a dozen of your very best detectives to accompany us, and let them go one at a time to the miser's mansion soon after dark."

"I will be at the gate to receive them, and you also when you come."

"Then that will be the scene of their capture?"

"Yes, chief."

"You know them all then?"

"Yes, and who do you think is their chief?"

"Who?"

"Your friend Clyde Colton."

"Bah!"

"It is so."

The chief laughed.

"Well, I'll prove it to you before this time to-morrow night."

"Do you mean it, Dick?"

"Was never more in earnest in my life."

"Have you found your Mascot as well?"

"Yes, and she goes free."

"Who is she?"

"Remember, it is a secret, for she goes free and unsuspected."

"Certainly, Dick, if you wish it."

"It is all I ask."

"It is the wife of Clyde Colton."

"My God!"

"Have you the proof of all your charges, Dick Doom?"

"I told you once, chief, that I never made a charge against any one until I was sure."

"Yes, and I believe you."

"Now to go down to the office and send word to those men not to be seen all day to-morrow, but to remain in charge," and while the chief went down-town Dick Doom returned to his quarters in the miser's mansion.

The day dawned and passed, leaving the public still in ignorance of the murder of the old sailor, and as soon as darkness came on the detectives picked for the work began to make their way to the place appointed by Dick Doom to meet them.

One by one they came and as quickly as they did so they were met by the young detective and sent into hiding.

The chief was the last to arrive, and Dick Doom hastily led him to the mansion and the men were all assembled.

"There are fourteen of us, chief, and there will be just six of them now."

"They will come through this secret panel in the wall, and, as they believe, kill me in yonder cot."

"When all are in the room we can act."

And act they did, for all came out as Dick Doom had said it would, and once more the old miser's house was the scene of a tragedy, for two of the crooks fell dead in their tracks, when they found themselves in a trap, and refused to surrender.

And one of those two was Clyde Colton, and when the detectives had sought to capture him alive they had failed, for he had died by his own hand, a fitting end for such a man.

The next morning the papers that came out with the story of the old sailor's murder, also contained the notices of the wiping out of the secret band of assassins known as the Gold Ghouls, the capture of their booty and death by suicide of their chief.

Like a thunderbolt it fell upon all to learn that Clyde Colton was none other than the chief of the secret assassins.

What became of his wife was a mystery to all, all save Dick Doom and the few who were let into her secret; but those who did know were happy in the thought that she had left the past behind and after several years married a good and noble man, while ever at her home is most welcome Dick Doom whom she so faithfully shadowed as his Mysterious Mascot.

THE END.

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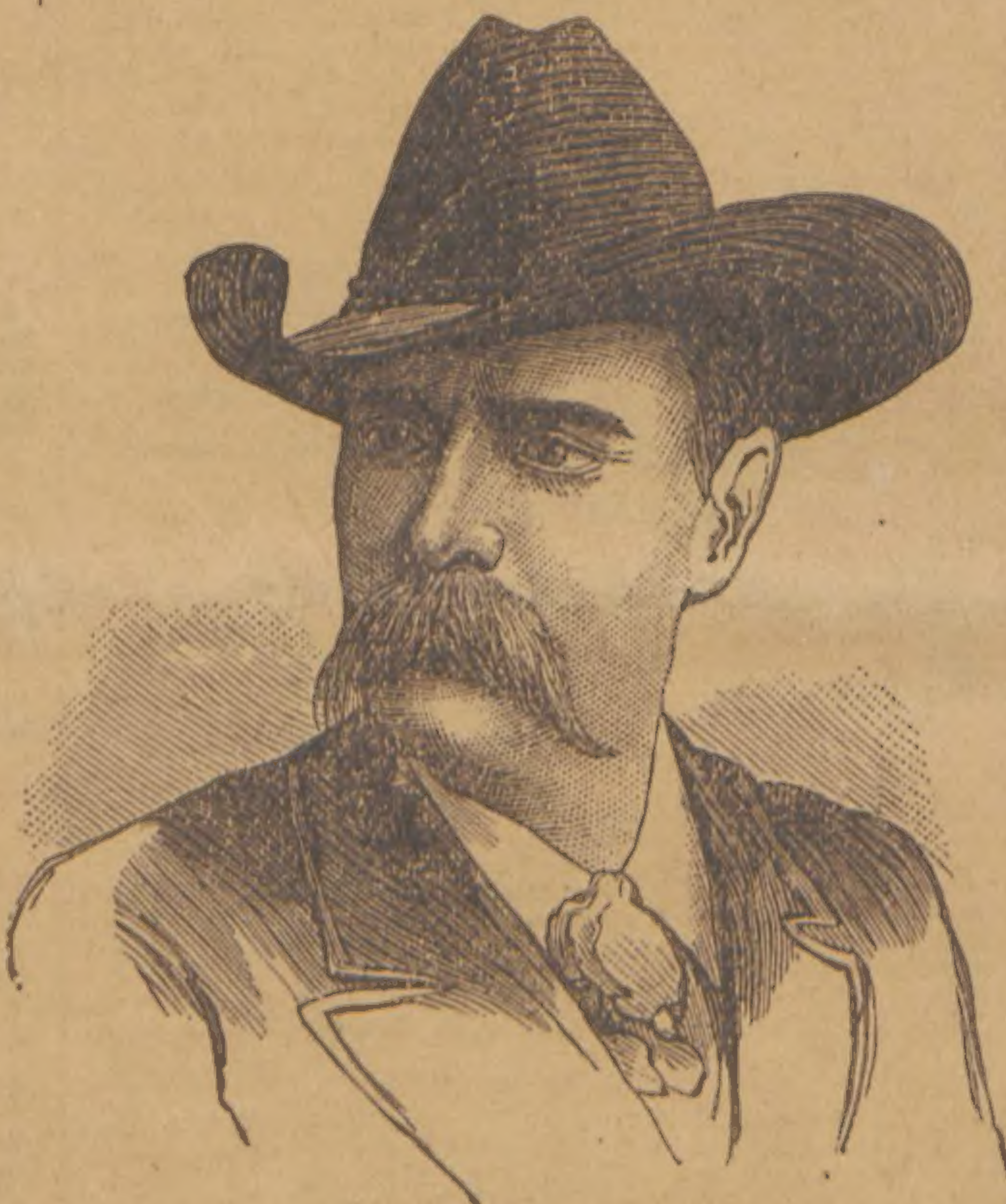
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